

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED



RALPH S. KENDALL

Gahinang

BENTON
Of the Royal Mounted

BENTON

Of the Royal Mounted

A TALE OF THE ROYAL
NORTHWEST MOUNTED POLICE

BY
RALPH S. KENDALL

*"Let us now praise famous men"—
Men of little showing—
For their work continueth,
And their work continueth,
Broad and deep continueth,
Greater than their knowing!*

KIPLING

TORONTO: S. B. GUNDY
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY
LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
MCMXVIII

PS 2521

E346

E45

1918

PXXX

COPYRIGHT · 1918 · BY JOHN LANE COMPANY

THE · PLIMPTON · PRESS
NORWOOD · MASS · U·S·A

0 910738

To

MY OLD COMRADES

PRESENT, AND EX-MEMBERS OF THE
R.N.W.M. POLICE

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED
WITH EVERY KIND THOUGHT

FOREWORD

THE scenes of this story belong to bygone days. As the passer-by views the ugly half-constructed railway terminus which now sprawls itself over the original site of that historic group of Police buildings, known as the "Post," little does he appreciate the pangs of real regret which stir the hearts of old members of the Force, as they recall associations of earlier years.

Scattered now beyond the writer's ken are those good fellows with whom he served in years gone by. They were men of a type fast disappearing, with whom any one would have been proud to associate and call "comrades." No longer do those once orderly grounds resound with the clear notes of the trumpet-call, the neighing of troop-horses, or the harsh-barked word of command. Gone is the old Guardroom at the gates of the main entrance. The spot where the O.C.'s house lay half hidden amidst its clustering shrubbery and trim, well-kept lawn and kitchen garden, is now but a drab area of railway tracks. Missing is the towering flag staff, from whose top-gaff, visible for miles around, there flew from "Reveille" to "Retreat" the brave emblem of our Empire.

But today, while these lines are being penned, many members and ex-members of the old Force are

still sternly serving that flag; gaining well-deserved military honors, shedding their blood, and laying down their lives in the great and terrible struggle for supremacy between Human Liberty, and Iron Oppression that overshadows the world.

Aye! . . . small wonder that the sight of the old spot awakens strange memories in those of us who were stationed there in our youth. Members of a force of comparatively small numbers, it is true, but with a reputation for efficiency, discipline, and stern adherence to duty which has rarely been equaled, and is too widely known to need any further eulogy in this story.

R. S. K.

BENTON
Of the Royal Mounted

BENTON

of the Royal Mounted

CHAPTER I

*"We've some of us prospered, and some of us failed,
But we all of us heave a sigh
When we think of the times that we used to have
In those happy days gone by.
When we used to whistle, and work, and sing,
Make love, drink, gamble, and have our fling;
Caring little for what the morrow might bring —
In those good old days gone by."*

MEMORIES

WITH the outlines of its shadowy white walls and dark roof silhouetted in sharp relief against a glorious full moon, the big main building of the old Mounted Police Post of L Division stood forth — like a lone monument to the majesty of British Law. A turfed "square," framed within a border of whitewashed stones, lay at its front like a black carpet. Clustered about the central structure were the long, low-lying guardroom, stables, quartermaster's store, and several smaller adjacent buildings comprising "the Barracks." Stray patches of silvery light illuminated the dark recesses between them. It was a perfect night following an unparalleled June day in sunny South Alberta.

12 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

The "Post," with its shadowy outlines, presented a striking contrast to its activity by day. In the daytime gangs of prisoners in their checkered jail garb were to be seen tramping sedately here and there, engaged on various jobs about the carefully kept grounds. An armed "escort" followed grimly behind each gang. Police teams, hitched to buckboards and heavy, high-seated transport wagons, arrived and departed with a clatter. Mounted men, on big upstanding horses, came and went continually, each rider intent upon his own particular mission. At the guardroom, the quartermaster's store, and the orderly-room the same ordered action and busy preoccupation were noticeable.

The only sounds that disturbed the peaceful serenity of the moonlit scene proceeded from a lighted open window in the center of the main building, where the men's quarters and the regimental canteen were located. An uproarious hilarity resounded through the stillness; the shrill yaps of a pup and the tinkling of a piano rising above the tumult of song and laughter.

These jovial evidences of good fellowship floated across the square, not unwelcomely, to the ears of a solitary rider, whose weary horse was bearing him slowly along the hard graveled driveway which led from the main gateway to the stables. Dismounting somewhat stiffly, the man stood for a moment, listening to the sounds of revelry. He gazed silently toward the beacon of good cheer which seemed to beckon him. Then suddenly turning on his heel, he trudged wearily on to his destination, leading his mount.

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 13

After spending half an hour or more in off-saddling, rubbing down, and attending scrupulously, if mechanically, to his animal's wants, the horseman emerged from the stable, locked the door, and walked slowly across the square to the Canteen.

Duly arriving at his cheerful haven, the newcomer opened the canteen door and for a moment or two silently contemplated the all-familiar scene of a large, well-lighted room with a bar at one end, behind which, on rows of shelves, were stacked various kinds of dry provisions, tobacco in all its forms, and miscellaneous odds and ends of a mounted policeman's requirements supplementary to his regular "kit."

Seated around small tables, playing cards, or else perched upon high stools against the bar, he beheld a score or so of bronzed, soldierly-looking men of all ages, ranging from twenty to forty. They were dressed variously — some in the regulation uniform of the Force — i.e., scarlet serge tunic, dark-blue cord riding-breeches with the broad yellow stripe down the side, and high brown "Strathcona" boots with straight-shanked, "cavalry jack" spurs attached. Some again — with an eye to comfort alone — just in loose, easy, brown duck "fatigue slacks." Many of the older members might have been remarked wearing the active-service ribbons of former campaigns in which they had served.

Their day's duty over, careless and jovial they sat, amidst the tobacco-smoke-hazy atmosphere, smoking and drinking their beer and exchanging good-natured repartee which occasionally was of a nature that has caused a certain great writer to affirm, with

14 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

well-grounded conviction, that "single men in barracks don't grow into plaster saints." Poor enough stuff it was for the most part, I fancy, but there! . . . we were easily satisfied — we were not inclined to be over-fastidious in the Canteen, and anyhow . . . it passed the time away.

At the piano was an ex-Dublin Fusileer, with a comical face and an accent suggestive of "Silver Street," who acted as general accompanist. His own vocal talent was being contributed just now, and a chorus of shouts, banging of beer tankards and stamping of feet greeted the final verse of his song, the burden of which was —

*"An' whin we gits to Donnybrook Fair, comes Thady, with his fiddle,
An' all th' bhoys an' colleens there a-dancin' down th' middle;
Shpuds, shillaleghs, pigs an' potheen — all as ye thrapsed along —
Hurroo! for a chune on th' nob av 'um who'd intherrrupt me
song!"*

A little fox terrier pup, clinging with ludicrous gravity to a somewhat precarious position behind a man who was perched all doubled up on one of the high stools aforesaid, growled and snapped with puppy viciousness at all teasing attempts to dislodge him, adding to the general uproar. His master, Constable Markham, who, from certain indisputably "simian" peculiarities of feature and habits, was not inaptly designated "the Monk," had, as the result of his frequent libations, succeeded in cultivating — what, in canteen parlance was termed — "a singing jag." Now, elbows on bar, he began to bellow out a lone doggerel ditty for his own exclusive benefit. Something where each bucolic verse wound up with —

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 15

*"O be I I, or bain't I I—
I tell ee I bain't zuch a wule as I luke!"*

The Orderly-room Sergeant, Dudley, a tall, good-looking fair man about thirty, who, leaning on the bar alongside was endeavoring amidst the din to carry on a conversation with a corporal named Harrison, turned somewhat wearily to the maudlin vocalist.

"Oh, now, for the love of Mike! . . . try an' forget it, Monk, do!" he drawled. "Charity begins at home! . . . as if there wasn't *enough* racket in here without you adding *your* little pipe! . . . sitting there all humped up an' hawkin' away like a — old crow on his native muck-heap! . . . Be I I, or bain't I I?" he exploded, with a snort of derision at the other's uncouth Somersetshire dialect, and after a long pause: "By gum! there's no mistake about you . . . you're well named! You'd be quite at home in the jungle!"

He faced round again to the grinning corporal. "Say, Harrison," he resumed, "don't know if Benton's come in yet, do you?" He lowered his voice confidentially. "'Father's' called him in about something and I want to see him directly he lands in — first crack out of the box."

His eyes, wandering vaguely over the noisy crowd as he spoke, suddenly dilated with surprised recognition as they lighted upon the newcomer, whose unobtrusive entrance amidst the general revelry had somehow escaped his notice.

"Talk of the devil!" he ejaculated with easy incivility; "why here the —— is! Why, hello, Ben! How's things goin' in Elbow Vale?"

16 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

The object of this familiarity, walking silently forward to the bar with a whimsical smile on his bronzed, dusty countenance, merely opened his mouth to which he pointed in dumb show.

"Dear me!" remarked the Orderly-room Sergeant sympathetically, "as bad as all that? Here, Bob! set 'em up! . . . give Sergeant Benton a 'long 'un'!"

The "long 'un" tendered by the canteen orderly arrived and disappeared, another following speedily on top of it; their recipient then, his thirst temporarily appeased, turned to the two non-coms.

There remains engraven indelibly upon the memory of the writer, as he recalls the striking personal appearance and quietly forceful character of Ellis Benton, a slightly saturnine, *still* face, with high, bold, regular features, suggestive rather of the ancient Roman type; coldly handsome in its clean-cut patrician mold but marred somewhat by a peculiar thin old scar, like a whip-lash, which extended from an angle of the grim-lipped yet tender mouth up to the left cheek bone. This facial disfigurement contrived to give him an expression of faint perpetual cynicism, as it were, which was accentuated by a pair of tired-looking pale gray eyes, deeply set under thick, dark, level brows — eyes which seemed to glow at times with a somber light like smoldering fire in their depths — eyes that were vaguely disturbing, bidding you beware of the man's ruthless anger when aroused.

Altogether it was a remarkable face with its indefinable stamp of iron-willed, quietly reckless courage, indicative of a strenuous past and open with

the possibilities for good or evil alike, as caprice should happen to sway its possessor's varying moods.

And yet, strange to say, in spite of his hard-bitten, cynical exterior and characteristics that verged sometimes on actual brutality, deep, deep down in his complex soul Ellis Benton hid an almost womanish tenderness, coupled with a sensitive artistic temperament that few were aware of or would have credited. In figure he was splendidly proportioned. Not overly tall, but with the lean, wiry flanks, broad, square shoulders, and slim waist of the trained athlete that denoted great activity, and the possession of immense concentrated strength whenever he chose to use it. The "Stetson" hat, tipped back, exposed slightly graying, closely cropped brown hair. But the young-looking face dispelled at once the first impression of age, for Ellis was only thirty-eight.

His well-fitting uniform, consisting of a "stable jacket" of the regulation brown duck, on which were noticeable the "Distinguished Conduct," and the "King's" and "Queen's" South African campaign ribbons, riding-breeches, boots and spurs, was thickly covered with dust, for he had ridden into the Post from his detachment which lay many weary miles to the south.

"Well," he remarked to the Orderly-room Sergeant and, with significant emphasis, "what's doin' now?"

For the most part he spoke lazily in the slipshod, drawling vernacular acquired from long residence in the West, though when occasion arose he could revert naturally and easily to the educated speech of his early upbringing.

18 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

Dudley did not reply at first but shot a warning, almost imperceptible, sidelong glance towards the crowd, enjoining silence. Obeying the other's gesture, the detachment sergeant held his peace awhile, and presently the two men, moving away from the bar, seated themselves at one of the small tables and began to talk together earnestly in low tones.

The clamor around them increased. Out broke the old barrack-room chorus "Johnny Green," which, to the tune of the "Sailor's Hornpipe" goes, as all Service men are aware:

*"Oh, say, Johnny Green! did you ever see the Queen?
Did you ever catch a Blue-jacket lovin' a Marine?
May the Rock of Gibraltar take a runnin' jump at Malta
If I ever see a nigger with a white — rum-tum."*

"So *that*," concluded the Orderly-room Sergeant, "is what the old man's got you in for. Did you make a *good* job of it?"

Benton's pale, deeply set eyes began to glow with their peculiar baleful light.

"Did I?" he echoed mirthlessly. "Well, I should smile! . . . An' I'll make a better one still when I go back. I'll bash that — till he spits blood!"

He uttered the threat in an even, passionless, unraised voice, as if it were just the merest commonplace remark. A canteen-chant held its own with steady insistence:

*Three — men — in-a-boat, inaboat,
Three — men — all-very-dry,
Three — men — ridin'-a-Nannygoat,
Go it you —! you've only one eye!*

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 19

Dudley summarized briefly, in a tense undertone, the thing that Benton need not be, regarding him closely meanwhile with slightly anxious eyes. The bronzed, reckless face — naturally somber when in repose — wore a terribly ruthless expression just then.

"Oh, now, forget it, Ben," was his half joking admonition. "What the d—l's the use of you runnin' amuck again an' makin' bad worse? . . . That won't help matters one little bit . . . an' you know it."

Ever and anon — above the roar of the Canteen, not unlike the booming note of a bittern amid the croaking and chirping of all the other lesser denizens of some swamp — would rise the mighty brogue of the genial Constable O'Hara, in a general exhortation to:

"Come on! Fwet yure whustles an' sing-g, ye scutts, with 'gr-reat gusto.' For ut was:

*Down, down, in swate Counthy Down,
An' th' pore ol' night-watchman was jus' passin' roun;
Puts his hand to his nob to feel where he was hit —
Ses he "Holy Shmoke! but Oi'm —"*

The stentorian voice broke off short as the vocalist glanced suspiciously at the empty glass at his elbow which a minute before had been full.

"Here," quoth he with some heat; "who was ut dhrunk my beer? . . . Was ut you, Tabuteau? . . . Eyah, now! but thot's a Galway man's thrick ivry toime! . . . Fill ut up agin, an' kape ut filled continuous, tu, ye Fenian rapparees, d'ye hear? . . . else, begob! ye can get some other shtiff tu blow the 'Pipes av Pan' for ye! . . . Come on, now! . . .

20 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

fwet yure whustles an' opin yure thraps an' sing-g,
ye half-baked omadhauns! . . . Now, thin! all to-
gether! For ut was:

*Not las' night, but th' night behfure,
Tu tohm-cahts come a-knockin' at th' dhure;*

Ellis remained very still for some time, staring at his companion with an absent, brooding face.

"Just think what it'd mean," pursued Dudley. "As this matter stands just now you *have* got a reasonable show of getting away with it; but, I tell you flat, old man . . . a *second* edition of it wouldn't go. . . . You know what 'Father's' like in Orderly-room. You never know which way he's going to jump. . . . You'd be 'broke' for a certainty, anyway. . . . I don't want to see your name in 'G.O.'s' *that* way. . . . Come, now! will you be a wise guy an' listen to your Uncle Dud?"

Thus he pleaded with the man who was to him a comrade and a sincere friend.

"Oh, well," responded Benton at last, wearily, with an oath. "I guess I'll let up on that stiff this time. I handed him enough to last for a bit, anyway, so that's some satisfaction."

He bit off the end of a cigar which the other handed to him, continuing: "Oh, I'll get away with it all hunkadory . . . been up against it before . . . lots of times. . . . Guess I can make the grade — that is, if 'Father' *does* come to Orderly-room in anything like a good temper tomorrow."

Dudley, his point gained, got up and fetched two fresh tankards of beer.

"Were you ever at such a howling 'gaff' before

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 21

in all your life?" he remarked irritably. "I'll bet 'Father' can hear 'em right across the square there." And, as a penetrating Cockney voice then uplifted itself, "how's that for 'Whitechapel'? . . . listen to 'Tork abaht Tompkins.'"

*Too 'ard! too 'ard! An' th' ol' duck said, as she waddled
dahn th' yard
"Oh, I can 'atch a turkey or 'atch a chick
But I'm—if I can 'atch 'arf a brick!
It's a—bit bit,—bit bit,—bit bit too 'ard!"*

His audience, tickled beyond measure at the inimitable "coster" accent which, for many years has been so famously exploited by Mr. Albert Chevalier, egged this performer on to further efforts. Nothing loath, he complied, and presently the Canteen was shaking with:

*Oh, nah I'm goin' to be a reg'lar torff,
A-drivin' in me kerridge an' me pair,
Wiv a top-'at on me 'ead, an' fewvers in me bed
An' call meself th' "Dook of Barney-fair."
"As-stir-th'-can" rahnd th' collar o' me coat,
An' a "Piccadilly winder" in me eye;
Gorblimey! 'ear th' costers a-shoutin' in yer lug:
"Oh! leave us in yer will afore yer die!"*

On went the singing, shouting pandemonium. Benton's face began to clear a little. He had not been in the Post for a long time and the homely racket and the beer combined, gradually had the effect of making him forget his troubles for the time being.

*An—d . . . the elephant walked round,
And the band began to play,
So all you beggars that cannot sing!
You'd better get out of the way!*

22 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

A dozen or so of unprintable "limericks" followed this announcement, contributed in rotation by various members of the community, the "elephant" chorus "walking around" solemnly at the conclusion of each one. A particularly ingenious composition just then drew a perfect storm of laughter from the genial crowd, Ellis (sad to relate) guffawing loudly with the rest.

"Sacred Billy!" he ejaculated, grinning at Dudley, "but you're sure a tough bunch in this old Post. . . . Did you hear that one? . . . Well! . . . this is no place for a parson's son!"

The Orderly-room Sergeant did not answer for a moment, then an expression, which was a mixture of amusement and disgust, slowly overspread his rather refined face, and a snorting, reluctant chuckle escaped him.

"Is that so? . . . 'Many's the true word spoken in jest'!" he retorted. "Porteous — the young devil who came across with *that* one, is a 'parson's son,' as it happens, my boy. . . . His old man's the Dean of some fat living or another in the South of England. . . . By George, though! . . . I'm getting just about fed up with that stuff, night after night. . . . Tip us a stave, Ben! . . . start in now and sing us something decent for a change."

He got up suddenly from the table and, lifting his tankard high as if for a toast, bawled "Order!" A slight lull followed, taking advantage of which, he called out:

"Say, you fellows! . . . I propose we call on Sergeant Benton, here, for a song!"

A vociferous assent greeted his suggestion imme-

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 23

diately, and all eyes were turned on Ellis, with encouraging shouts of: "You bet! . . . That's the talk! Come, on, Sergeant! please! . . . Order, there! . . . Shut your traps for a bit!" For, they all knew that when in the mood he *could* sing.

Benton did not move for a minute, then: "Dog-gone you!" he remarked, with a resigned sigh to Dudley, "*you've* let me in for this! . . . An' I just wanted to sit here quiet!"

He quaffed a long draught of beer and got up though presently and, sauntering over to the piano which O'Hara promptly vacated for him, seated himself. A comparative quiet ensued. Even "the Monk's" maudlin ribaldry ceased, and that worthy becoming interested, he slewed around on his perch so as to hear the better, unceremoniously shoving off his faithful pup—"Kid"—in the movement, which sent that canine with a hasty "flop" to the floor.

With the hard lines of his face momentarily softened with an expression of genial bonhomie, the Sergeant toyed absently with the keys for a space, thinking of something appropriate for that hilarious company; then suddenly, a clear baritone voice of remarkable depth and richness, rang out in the old familiar song of "Mandalay":

*"Come you back to Mandalay,
Where the old Flotilla lay:
Can't you 'ear their paddles chunkin' from
Rangoon to Mandalay?
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin'-fishes play,
An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer
China 'crost the Bay!"*

The last verse but one begins, as you know, with

24 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

the sort of irritable abandon typical of a soldier's "grouse":

*"Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,
Where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a man can raise a
thirst;*

*For the temple-bells are callin', an' it's there that I would be —
By the old Moulmein Pagoda, lookin' lazy at the sea;"*

He finished the rollicking old ballad amid thundering applause and louds shouts of "'Core! 'Core!" "Give us 'In Cellar Cool'!" "Give us 'Father O'Flynn'!" etc. But just then the clear, long-drawn-out, sweet notes of a trumpet-call sounded outside on the square. The Orderly-room Sergeant looked at his watch.

"Hello! . . . Didn't know it was so late!" he ejaculated. "Come on, there! Turn out! . . . 'First Post's' just gone!"

And the Canteen gradually emptied as the men departed noisily to their respective barrack-rooms.

CHAPTER II

*A man severe he was, and stern to view;
I knew him well, and every truant knew:
Well had the boding tremblers learn'd to trace
The day's disasters in his morning face;
Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee,
At all his jokes, and many a joke had he;
Full well the busy whisper circling round,
Convey'd the dismal tidings when he frown'd.*

GOLDSMITH

CAPTAIN RICHARD BARGRAVE, Superintendent of L Division — better known by the fond appellation of “Father” — sauntered slowly along the narrow sidewalk leading from his quarters to the orderly-room; the aged black-and-white setter “Bob,” his constant companion, keeping step behind.

How well many of us can recall that tall, spare, soldierly figure, and the walk with its faint suggestion of old-fashioned cavalry swagger, while the whispers of “Look out! here’s Father coming now!” sent us all scuttling about our duties. How we used to fume and curse (behind his back) at his numerous erratic bursts of temper and little eccentricities. How his polished sarcasm and fluent adjectives used to curl us up and, incidentally — excite our envy. And yet — how we learned to trust and respect that irascible but kindly old aristocratic face, with its sweeping fair mustache. Aye! —

26 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

*He passed as a Man in our critical eyes,
Stern, yet kindly — simple, yet wise,
Who'd upheld his rank since his service began
As "An Officer, and . . . a Gentleman."*

"Father's a rum old beggar but, begad, he's a gentleman and always gives you a square deal," was our invariable retort to divers disparaging criticisms from members of other divisions, less fortunate, perhaps, in the stamp of their own particular "Officer Commanding."

Benton, who, attired in a red serge tunic — borrowed from Dudley for the occasion — was looking through the billiard-room window, watched his approach with interest. When nearing the orderly-room the old dog, seeing "the Monk's" pup in supreme possession of the step, jumped forward with a threatening growl to eject the usurper of his own customary lounge. In the scuffle that ensued they got between "Father's" legs and nearly upset him.

"Damn the dogs! Damn the dogs!" he chuckled softly.

And, stepping over them carefully, with a fond, benevolent smile, he passed on through the open door, half humming, half whistling a hymn tune, which was not, however, prompted by especial piety. It was a habit of his. But to the observant sergeant it was an omen.

"He *is* in a good temper," he muttered with relief, and quietly he awaited the summons that he knew must come.

It came presently. "Sergeant Major! . . . Oh, Sergeant Major!" came the thin, high, cultured voice. "Has Sergeant Benton reported in yet from Elbow Vale?"

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 27

The gruff official holding that rank and who was familiar to most members of the Division as "Mickey," saluted and replied in the affirmative.

"Send him in!" came the order, and shortly Ellis found himself standing at "attention," facing his seated superior.

"That will do, Sergeant Major! . . . Kindly close the door," and they were alone.

There was silence for a moment or two, during which the O.C. rummaged amongst some letters on his desk. He found the one he wanted and scrutinized it carefully. "Sergeant Benton," he began, with a sudden snap in his tones and a quick upward glance that strung that individual up to tense expectancy, "I have here a letter — an *anonymous* letter — accusing you-of-grossly and maliciously-assaulting a well known and respected citizen of Elbow Vale on the night of the twelfth instance. . . . Motive unknown — all names — with the exception of your own — omitted. Said assault of such severe character that its recipient is still confined to bed.

"Now, sir! . . . although I generally make a rule of treating anonymous correspondence with the contempt it deserves — there seems something vaguely familiar in this handwriting that inclines me on this occasion to revoke my usual practise, and make a few inquiries into this puzzle. I look to you for the key. You have the reputation of being a truthful man in this Division. . . . Is the statement in this letter correct?"

Benton hesitated. "As far as the assault goes, yes, sir," he said finally.

"What led to this assault?"

28 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

The Sergeant hesitated again. "A dirty slander, sir, connecting me with a married woman in the town," he said.

The Captain tapped with his pen and eyed Ellis keenly. "*Was* it a slander?" he queried quizzically — and then repented, for there was a look on that reckless but gentlemanly face that dispelled all doubt — even before the man's answer came.

"Ah, well, then," said the O.C., "that accounts for this letter being anonymous. Now give me all names and particulars of this affair."

The Sergeant did so and the Captain's face darkened as he listened. "So that's who it is, eh?" he muttered thoughtfully. "Thought I knew that writing again. . . . I remember the man — well — but I don't think I've ever met the lady." And the fair mustache was twirled gallantly.

The recital finished by the Sergeant remarking: "I couldn't very well — under the circumstances, sir — lay a charge, or act otherwise than I did — without dragging the lady's name into this miserable affair."

"You've no business going about assaulting people, anyway," retorted the old gentleman irascibly, with one of his characteristic changes of front. "And though it is not my intention to take any further notice of this unsigned epistle, as I am fully convinced you have told me the absolute truth — I do not think it would be good policy to send a man with your pugilistic tendencies back to this locality again. Let's see," he mused aloud, "you're a good range man. I think I'll transfer you to Cherry Creek, where you will be, I hope, beyond all temp-

tation of getting involved again in any more of these — ah — social misunderstandings (Ellis groaned inwardly). Arrange for your kit to be sent in from Elbow Vale and proceed to Cherry Creek. I will give you a written order for Corporal Williamson to hand over the detachment to you and to come in to the Post. He seems to have been getting slack, for there are a lot of stock-rustling complaints coming in from his district lately. See if you cannot effect a change in present conditions there.

"Well!" he grunted impatiently, as the Sergeant halted irresolutely at the door, "what is it?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Benton, "but can I keep the same horse?"

"Oh, I suppose — I suppose," said the O.C. testily. "Damme, sir! . . . You've had that cursed horse transferred from every detachment you've been stationed at!" He fussed with some papers. "You'd better tell Williamson then, to ride in, and the next man who goes to Elbow Vale can take *his* horse. That is all, Sergeant. . . . Report to the Sergeant-Major of your transfer."

In the passage Ellis encountered the Sergeant-Major and Dudley. "Banishment — physically, socially, and morally — right back to the 'bald-headed' again!" he plained dismally to their inquiring grins. "Father intimating in his own happy fashion that I wasn't quite civilized enough to hold down a Line detachment. . . . Cherry Creek! . . . O Lord!"

Inside the orderly-room the Captain, meanwhile, was slowly pacing backwards and forwards, hands clasped behind back. Through his teeth he softly

30 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

hissed one of his eternal hymn tunes, which he suddenly broke off short to ejaculate with a low-toned, jerky abruptness to himself —“ D—n the man! — d—n the man! Don't blame him! Couldn't tell him so, though! Thought I knew that writing! D—d cad, that fellow Cooper! . . . Knew him years ago! D—d rascal! Glad Benton thrashed him! Done the same myself! — younger days! ”

He resumed his interrupted hymn.

CHAPTER III

*Therefore, Christian men be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor,
Shall yourselves find blessing.*

GOOD KING WENCESLAS. (*Old Carol*)

THREE weeks elapsed and Benton again showed up in the Post with the first fruits of his new scene of operations — two prisoners committed for trial on a charge of cattle stealing.

His had been a weary watch for many nights, but he had caught his men at last, slaughtering stolen beef cattle in an old deserted corral at three o'clock in the morning. He looked worn out and had a black eye, received in the rough-and-tumble arrest that had followed.

The Captain was secretly pleased, but to Ellis he evinced little sign of his satisfaction. "Praise men up — spoil 'em! Let 'em think it's their ordinary course of duty," was his customary maxim.

"Good man, that Benton," he muttered to himself during one of his office pacings. "He'll straighten that Cherry Creek district out before long."

He gave the Sergeant three days' rest, though, and spoke about transferring him a man if required, which offer Ellis declined, however. With his taciturn and secretive nature he preferred to follow

32 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

alone, and in various disguises, the tortuous windings of stock cases, calmly relying on his own great strength, cunning, and ability with gun and fist, to effect any arrest.

The four-fifteen West-bound carried him as a passenger back to Sabbano, his nearest railway depot, the detachment being on the prairies forty miles away from the line. It was raining, and Ellis felt miserable as he gazed through the window and contemplated the wet, cheerless ride he would have in the morning.

He vaguely thought of "Johnny" waiting for him in Sergeant Churchill's stable at Sabbano. Was he being properly looked after? Churchill was a "booze artist," d—n him, and like as not he'd neglect him, like he did his own horse.

He was aroused from his gloomy abstraction by something tugging at his riding-crop and, turning his eyes he beheld a little curly-headed tot leaning over the back of the seat ahead of him. She was perhaps about three years old, and her blue eyes were sparkling with determination as she pulled at the leather thong with all her baby strength, in a desperate effort to possess herself of the desired treasure.

Benton's moody face immediately softened with a friendly grin. He loved children and they instinctively came to him without fear.

"Hello, Sis," he said. "You want it?" and he surrendered the coveted plaything, which she immediately started to flourish with great glee. The mother, a thin, shabbily dressed, careworn-looking young woman about thirty, looked on with a loving smile that glorified her poor, pinched face.

"Oh, Nellie, Nellie," she said reprovingly; "you mustn't — you'll hit somebody" and she turned to Benton, saying, "I hope my little girl isn't worrying you?"

"Not a bit — not a bit," he returned cheerily. "Kids are welcome to tease me any old time."

Scrambling down from her perch, the little one gazed at his uniform with lively interest and tentatively tapped his boots and the rowels of his spurs with the crop. "Toldier," she lisped, and without more ado she climbed up beside him on the seat and, putting her little arms around his neck, gave him a genuine loving hug and kiss which fairly took him by storm and caused broad laughs of amusement to come from those sitting near.

The touch of those baby lips awoke a strange longing in the heart of the lonely man, and a dreamy, far-away look momentarily softened his hard face. To have a comfortable home to come back to every night, and not to be chased around here, there, and everywhere at the whims of the powers that be. To be happily married to a loving girl-wife, and have kiddies that would climb all over you, and run after you, and where you could lie on the sands, in the sun, by the sea, somewhere, and watch 'em playing —

A sudden exclamation from the mother awoke him sharply from his reverie.

"What's the matter?" he asked. She seemed terribly agitated. "Oh!" she said; "I've lost my hand-bag, and my ticket was in it and some money!"

"Were you sitting here all the time since you got on the train?" he inquired.

34 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

"No," she answered; "I was on that seat at the far end when I first came in this coach."

He got up and, walking down the aisle, made a thorough search of the place that she indicated, but his efforts were fruitless. It was a little brown Morocco-leather bag, she informed him, with her name, "Elizabeth Wilson," on it, under a celluloid panel.

"Who was sitting by you?" he asked. "D'you think you could recognize the person again?"

She shook her head despondently. "Oh, I don't remember," she wailed. "My girlie was crying, and in trying to quiet her I guess I didn't notice anybody in particular."

"How much money was in your bag?" he asked.

"Twenty-five dollars," she said brokenly. "I am going to Vancouver to look for a position, and it's all I have in the world. Oh, what shall we do, my baby and I?"

Ellis eyed the forlorn face a moment or two in silent commiseration; then, seeking out the conductor, whom he knew well, explained the situation.

"Yes, I mind 'em getting on at Calgary," said that official; "and she had a ticket through to Vancouver, all right."

"Say, Bob," the Sergeant persuaded, "that bag's been pinched off her without a doubt; but as she's no suspicion of anybody I can't very well search every one on the bloomin' train, and I'm getting off in a minute at Sabbano — be a good fellow and pass her on to Vancouver. . . . She's dead up against it."

The kind-hearted conductor agreed, and with an

easier mind Ellis went back to the woman and told her.

The train began to slow down—"Sabbano—Sabbano!" called out the brakeman, passing through the coaches. The Sergeant reached into his pocket and, drawing out a roll of bills, pressed them into her hand.

"There," he said gently. "That'll keep you going in Vancouver for a time, and I hope you'll soon strike something."

Speechless with gratitude at the man's impulsive generosity, she gazed at him dumbly, with dim eyes. Her mouth worked but somehow the words would not come. She choked, and hiding her face in her hands, sank down on the seat, the poor, thin shoulders under the cheap blouse shaking with her convulsive sobbing.

The child, still clutching the crop, which Ellis had not the heart to retrieve, set up a shrill wail in sympathy and clung to his leg. More moved than he cared to show, but utterly indifferent to the slightly ludicrous side of the situation, the policeman strove to quiet her.

"Oh, come now, Sis," he pleaded coaxingly. "Mustn't cry. . . . Let go of me for a minute. . . . I'm coming back! . . . Here," and producing a pen-knife, he sliced off one of the lower buttons of his pea-jacket. . . . "There, give me a kiss."

The whimpers slowly ceased, and her little face brightened as she clutched the shining treasure and, drawing his face down to hers, she pressed her little rosebud of a mouth to his.

36 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

Disengaging the tiny arms gently, with a whispered "Good-by," he ran to the end of the coach and dropped off as the train moved out.

It was only characteristic of the man's strange, impulsive, complex nature that he should have done this thing, but how much money was there in that roll of bills? Ellis himself, offhand, could hardly have told you.

As in the rain he wended his way along the wet platform, the station agent came up to him. "Here's the key of the detachment, Sergeant," he said; "Churchill's gone West on that train to Parson's Lake. He's coming back on Number Two in the morning and he asked me to give it to you — didn't you see him?"

"No," said Ellis shortly. "I wasn't able to get off till it was on the move. . . . Guess Churchill got on another coach."

Not particularly sorry at the other's absence, he walked on to the end of the little town where the detachment was situated. The place smelled musty and stale as he entered. Papers, old letters, and torn novels lay littered about the local sergeant's desk. The bed was not made up and various items of kit were strewn around. Everything seemed covered with a thick accumulation of dust.

"Nasty, lazy, slovenly devil," he growled. "Lord, what a pig-pen! Inspector Purvis'll happen along down here, unexpected, one of these days. *Then* there'll be something doing."

He passed on through the back door to the stable, where a joyous whinny from "Johnny" greeted him. He led the horse out along with the Ser-

geant's and watered them, their greedy thirst drawing a savage curse from him. "Takes d—d good care never to go dry himself," he muttered.

After grooming Johnny down he went into the kitchen and rummaged around until he found two or three pieces of lump sugar, at the sight of which the horse began to nicker softly and raised its high forefoot, bending the limb back for a piece to be inserted into the fetlock-joint, where it was promptly licked out.

He was a superb, powerfully-built black, with white hind fetlocks, standing fully sixteen hands, well ribbed up, with the short back, strong, flat-boned legs, and good, sloping shoulders of the ideal saddle-horse. Benton had had him for over three years and was passionately attached to the animal.

He petted Johnny awhile then, fixing both horses up for the night, he went down to the only restaurant the little town boasted — a Chinese establishment — and got some supper. This despatched, he retraced his steps and mooned around the dirty detachment, where he tried to read; but his thoughts, ever and anon, kept reverting to the little cherubic face of the child on the train, with her hollow-cheeked mother, and he found himself vaguely wondering how far away they were by now.

He looked at his watch. It was about twenty minutes to ten and, feeling inclined for a drink, he strolled down town again and, entering the bar of the Golden West Hotel, ordered a glass of beer.

There were about half a dozen men in the bar who, after gazing awhile at his uniformed figure and seeing he was not the convivial Churchill, eyed him

38 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

with sullen distrust. His gaze flickered over them casually, but knowing nobody there but the bartender, he kept aloof.

Suddenly, amid the babel of talk, a drunken, nasal voice made itself heard:

"Oh, you Harry! Say, wha's dat dere wit de yaller laigs?"

Glancing sharply towards the end of the bar, he became aware of two flashily dressed, undesirable-looking individuals of the type that usually makes an easy living preying upon the unfortunate denizens of the underworld, sizing him up.

The one accosted as "Harry," a big, heavily-built man about thirty, with a sneer on his evilly handsome, sinister face, answered slowly:

"Oh, *him*. I guess he must be one of them Mounted Police ginks you hear tell of over our side of the Line. Kind of 'prairie cop,' " he added contemptuously, and spat.

The epithet of "cop" was one held in peculiar detestation by members of the Force and, coupled with the fellow's offensive manner, became a gratuitous insult that was almost more than the Sergeant could stand, for a slight titter followed, and all the faces — with the exception of the bartender's — wore a sardonic grin at the policeman's discomfiture.

Choking with silent fury, he glowered warily with swift calculation around him.

"No, it wouldn't do," he reflected. There would be too many witnesses, like in that last business at Elbow Vale; and fearful of his own ungovernable temper, lest any ensuing altercation should

precipitate the inevitable right then and there, he held his peace.

Lowering his voice, his elbows on the bar, he spoke quietly to the bartender:

"Who's them two fellers at the end there, Pete — strangers?"

"Yes. I dunno who they are," said that worthy in the same low tone, busy polishing glasses the while. "They blew in off'n the West-bound. Jest stiffs, I guess, Sergeant. They was laughin' fit to split 'bout somethin' when they first come in."

Benton finished his beer and, turning, pushed through the swing door, a vindictive purpose seething in his mind. Crossing over to the dark side of the street, he patiently waited.

"I'll 'vag' the two of them," he muttered savagely.

The rain had ceased and a few stars began to appear. It was nearly closing time and his watch was of short duration.

At the appointed time, with much bad language and noisy argument, the bar slowly emptied, the last to leave being "Harry" and his companion; the latter quarrelsome drunk, and expostulating with the bartender, who was escorting him to the door.

"Gimme another drink!" he demanded.

"No chance," came the answer. "You've got enough below. Beat it!"

The speech was accompanied with a sudden shove, and the door banged to.

Still the Sergeant waited.

"Aw, come on, yer crazy mutt!" he heard the

40 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

soberer voice of Harry say, and saw him walk slowly on down the street, his bibulous comrade unsteadily following.

Keeping in the shade, Ellis noiselessly paralleled their direction, until they were well beyond the last false-fronted store and amongst some vacant lots, not far from the isolated detachment. He stopped for a moment and listened intently. Except for the tipsy arguing of Harry's companion, who was still in the rear, all was quiet.

"Well, you gimme half, anyway," he heard him keep chanting.

Now was his chance. With two of them, he knew he must act quickly, and "acting quickly" was only a mild expression for *some* of the Sergeant's little methods in his business which, though invariably attended with excellent results, did not, sad to relate, always strictly conform to the rules laid down in that worthy little Manual issued to all members of the Force for their regimental and legal guidance.

With fell intention, he crossed over swiftly to the drunk. It was no time for niceties in the manner of arrest, for the man might arouse the neighborhood, and the Sergeant had reasons for not being particularly desirous of an audience just then.

With the deadly calculation of an ex-pugilist, he carefully judged his distance in the dim light and swung a single terrific right uppercut to the point of the chin. The head snapped back and, with a choking gasp, the man fell heavily to the ground in an inert heap.

At the smack and the thud of the falling body, Harry halted in the dark ahead.

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 41

"What's up?" he growled. "Are yer all in?"

Ellis shouldered roughly into him and, with an oath, the man reeled back.

"Why, what's this?" he blustered and, as the shadowy outline of Benton's Stetson hat in the uncertain light penetrated his vision, "why, it's the 'cop'!"

"Yes," said the Sergeant through his set teeth and, with suppressed fury, "I've got you now where I want you! I'll give you call me 'cop,' you G—d—d, dirty pimp!" and he smashed in a vicious left drive, flush on Harry's nose.

It was a staggering blow, and the blood squirted, but somehow the man kept his feet and threw himself into a fighting posture, like one accustomed to using his hands.

He was by far the heavier of the two, but his movements were slow and muscle-bound and the tigerishly vicious attack of the Sergeant, with all its concentrated hate and science behind it, paralyzed him. He tried to cover up, but those terrible punches with the giver's vindictive "Oof — oof," accompanying each blow, seemed to reach his body and face at will.

It was all over inside of three minutes. Presently, ducking a savage swing from his weightier opponent, Ellis feinted for the jaw then, like lightning, drove two heavy, telling punches to that region termed in pugilistic parlance the "solar plexus." The man, with a gasp, doubled up and sank down.

Breathing heavily after the exertion, Benton knelt on him and, reaching to his hip pocket, dragged forth his handcuffs and snapped them on

42 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

Harry's wrists; then, slowly rising to his feet, he waited.

It was still quiet all round, and he felt a fierce exultation at accomplishing his purpose without undue disturbance. Stepping over to his first victim, he made a quick examination, and satisfied himself that the man was only knocked out. He would come to after a time, he decided, and was probably more drunk than hurt. *Harry* was the one who had incurred his animosity the most.

Presently that individual, with a groaning curse, sat up and was violently sick. Then for the first time he became conscious of his manacled wrists and began to raise his voice in filthy expressions at Ellis.

"Quit that talk," said the Sergeant, in a tense, fierce undertone. "I don't want any bother and have you waking everybody up at this time o' night. I'm arresting both you fellers for vagrancy. Now, are you coming quiet or not?"

A torrent of blasphemy greeted the suggestion.

"Not you nor any other —— cop kin take me," he foamed from the ground; then, suddenly kicking out, he caught Benton a nasty jar on the shin-bone.

The pain acted as the last straw to the exasperated Sergeant. With an oath, he drew from his pocket a small steel article known in police circles as a "come-along" and, clipping it on one of his prisoner's wrists, he twisted viciously. The exquisite torture drew a shriek from the wretched man.

"Shut up," whispered Ellis savagely. "If you start hollerin' again and still refuse to walk I'll —— and he gave another slight twist to the wrist —— "I'll break your arm! Now will you come, eh?"

"Oh, o-o-h. No, no; oh, don't. Yes, yes, I'll come," came the agonized response.

"So," said the Sergeant quietly, as he jerked the man to his feet. "I thought you would. Now don't you start monkeyin' no more. Step out!" And with his hand on the other's collar, he guided him towards the detachment, which was only a short distance away.

On arriving there he unlocked the door and, ushering his captive into the office, at the back of which were two cells, he leisurely removed the handcuffs and proceeded to search him. What with blood, bruises, and dirt, the man's face was a sight, and Benton, his anger now somewhat assuaged, felt slightly uneasy as he reflected on the prisoner's appearance at the morrow's court.

"Put your arms up!" he ordered, and mechanically dived into the coat pockets. His right hand encountered something square and soft, and he drew it out.

At the sight of the object his eyes dilated strangely. Well, well; it was only a woman's little hand-bag with a name printed on it under a celluloid panel —

He read it at a quick glance and, ceasing his investigations, he grew curiously still. The prisoner, raising his head, met the Sergeant's gaze. He shrank back, appalled, and a cry of fear burst from his mashed lips, for it seemed to him as if the devil himself were looking out of Benton's ruthless eyes. With an indescribable bitterness of tone, the policeman suddenly spoke:

"You skunk," he said; "you dirty, sneaking coyote. It was *you*, then, that robbed that poor

44 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

thing with the little kiddie on the West-bound?"

He stopped and choked with his rage. Presently he burst out again: "Lord, Lord! but I'm glad I bashed you up like I did, and but for a probable charge of manslaughter I'd manhandle you properly. So *that's* what you and your pal were laughin' about when you went in to that bar? When you come to die — which event, may it please God to grant quickly — I hope that'll be the very, very last thing in your memory — that you once robbed a helpless woman and her kid."

He remained silent after this for a space, for a sudden disquieting thought had occurred to him.

"See here; look," he began again. "If I put this charge of theft against you, it'll mean having to locate and drag that woman back here all those weary miles, to identify her property and prove up the case against you."

At his words a gleam of hope lit up the prisoner's disfigured face.

"For God's sake, policeman," he mumbled out of his twisted mouth, "give us a chanct — just this once."

The Sergeant pondered awhile. It was the easiest way out for himself, *and* for the woman, he reflected. Churchill was away and nobody would know anything about this business. He tipped the contents of the bag out. A bunch of keys, a woman's handkerchief, some smelling-salts, a ticket to Vancouver, and various small odds and ends.

"Where's that money?" he snapped out. "Here — let's go through you!"

His search revealed a dollar's worth of silver.

"Dig up the rest of that twenty-five dollars!" he demanded.

Slowly the other took off one of his boots, and from it produced two ten-dollar bills.

"We had some dough of our own when we come on the train," he volunteered to Ellis's silent look of interrogation, "but we got inter a poker game with some fellers and lost out, so we broke into the five-spot fer some supper and booze."

Benton considered a bit longer, then suddenly made up his mind and opened the door.

"*Voertsek, du verdomde schelm!*"¹ he said sharply, jerking his head towards the aperture.

The man stared at him stupidly for a moment. "I don't savvy you," he muttered.

"Beat it, you d—d crook! D'you savvy *that?*" came the policeman's harsh response. "Out of town by the first train that comes in — East or West — and take your pal with you."

"We ain't got the price," was the somewhat aggrieved answer.

"Then take a 'tie pass,' d—n you," said the Sergeant grimly. "And mind — if I catch either of you fellers around this burg tomorrow morning, I'll shove you both in the calaboose *and* put the boots to you as *well* as this charge. Now beat it, and go and pick up your pal!"

Harry waited for no further invitation, but vanished into the night.

Wearily Ellis gathered up the contents of the bag and, putting in the money along, closed it. He felt

¹ A glossary of South African, and other words will be found at the end.

46 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

very tired and, lighting a cigarette, he sat down and tried to think.

"Guess I can get it through to her," he muttered. "I'll send a wire now that'll catch her on the train somewhere, and she can send me her address."

And going to the telephone he rang up the night-operator at the depot.

CHAPTER IV

*"And if you're wishful, O maiden kind,
To know concerning me;
A far-flung sentinel am
Of the R. N. W. M. P.
Renouncing women, as though wearing a cowl —
I live for a monthly wage
'Way out on the bald, green-brown prairie,
That stretches as far as the eye can see;
Where the lone gray wolf and the coyote howl,
And the badger digs in the sage."*

THE PRAIRIE DETACHMENT

THE day broke fine and clear. The hot sun quickly drying up the little puddles and sticky mud resulting from the recent down-pour. Benton, rising early, watered and fed the horses. These duties despatched, and his own breakfast at the hotel accounted for, he leisurely proceeded to ascertain if the two participants in his previous night's adventure had left town.

A few guarded inquiries and a brief, but thorough, search satisfied him on this point; so saddling up Johnny, and tying on his slicker, he rode slowly down to the depot to await the in-coming East-bound train prior to his departure for his lonely detachment.

The train arrived, and on it, Churchill. The local sergeant was a man about Ellis's own age, well set up and passable enough in appearance, but with the florid, blotchy complexion, weak mouth, and uncertain gaze of the habitual drinker. A few lucky

48 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

arrests in which chance — more than pluck or ability had figured, coupled with a certain cleverness in avoiding trouble — had somehow enabled him to retain his stripes and the sleepy little Line detachment. That there was no love lost between them was very evident; Benton, on his side, making little effort to disguise the contempt he felt for the other.

It was a long-standing hostility, dating back many years when, as recruits together in the Post, a trivial quarrel originating first in the Canteen, had terminated finally in the corral at the back of the regimental stables — with disastrous results to Churchill — who, ever since this event, had not been man enough to forget, forgive, or attempt to get even.

A few cold civilities were exchanged, and Ellis remarking, "Here's the key of your dive," chucked him over that article; then with a careless "So long," turned his horse and edged up nearer to the platform to speak to the station agent.

On account of a small wash-out that had happened to the track some few miles east, the train was held up for a short time, and the platform was crowded with passengers who were strolling up and down, glad of the opportunity to stretch their legs after their long confinement.

Benton, less impatient than Johnny, who was pawing, eager to be off, was watching them absently, when he suddenly became aware of his being, apparently, an object of interest to somebody standing near and, turning his head slightly, he beheld a tall, magnificently-built, dark girl, eyeing him and Johnny with eager curiosity and admiration.

And in very truth, handsome, saturnine-faced Ellis

Benton, and the big, black, pawing horse that he bestrode with the long-stirruped, loose-seated, easy, careless grace of an habitu   of the range, were both fitting representatives of the great Force which they served.

Wistful and sweet, the girl stood there and gazed awhile at man and horse and presently she slowly came forward and, with a kind, impulsive friendliness that immediately thawed the Sergeant's habitual reserve, said:

"I'm sure you must be thinking me awfully rude — staring at you so long; but I was looking at your beautiful horse and wondering whether you were a policeman or a soldier or what."

And, smiling whimsically down into the girl's eager upturned face, the Sergeant made answer:

"Young lady," with a droll little vainglorious gesture which amused her intensely, "behold in me one of those important officials who hold the High Justice, the Middle and the Low in these parts . . . a sergeant of the Mounted Police!" Then suddenly bitter remembrance set his pale, steady eyes agleam with their peculiar ruthless light and his strong white teeth gritted, as he added, "Otherwise, just a 'prairie cop.'"

She stroked and patted Johnny who, scenting a new friend, nickered softly, tucked up his nigh fetlock in a beseeching manner, and nibbled at her for sugar.

"Isn't he just a beauty!" she murmured. "My, but I'd be a proud girl if I had a horse like him to ride. Do you ever? — What is it, Auntie?" she said, breaking off short as a stout, elderly lady with

50 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

a petulant frown on her forbidding face, came bustling up.

"Gracious, Mary!" snapped the aunt, very much out of breath, "I've been looking everywhere for you," and angrily drawing the unwilling girl aside, Ellis heard her say, "You shouldn't go talking to strange men in that way, child . . . really, Mary, I'm surprised at you!"

"But, Auntie," came that young lady's slightly indignant answer, "I was only asking him about his horse, and he speaks quite like a gentleman."

The elder woman's response was partially inaudible to the Sergeant, but a fragment of it—"Only a policeman!" smote his ears unpleasantly with its pitiful snobbishness.

As they moved away, though, he was repaid for that lady's uncharitable remark, as the girl, taking advantage of "Auntie's" ample back being turned, faced round and bowed to him with a kindly smile, an unspoken "Good-by" manifested in the gesture which he at once returned with a courtly grace, saluting gravely.

Mechanically, his eyes followed the two ladies until they became lost in the crowd, and then, with a muttered oath, he wheeled Johnny around and rode slowly out of the town.

"What a fine-looking girl that was," he reflected. "Some rich American's daughter, no doubt, en route from Banff or elsewhere in the mountain summer resorts West, after having a good time." *Why* shouldn't she talk to him? And mixed with his brooding thoughts came the consciousness of his *own* joyless, danger-fraught life, with the bitter, hope-

less, lonely feeling that the single man past thirty knows so well, whose occupation, and more especially — means — place him without the pale of matrimony.

With the exception of those holding responsible staff appointments, marriage was not particularly encouraged amongst the rank and file of the Force, for many reasons. Lack of suitable quarters was partially the cause of this policy; also (and not the least) the indisputable fact that in the majority of cases where men are engaged in hazardous pursuits the average single man is freer, and — as is only natural — willing to run far greater personal risk in the execution of his duty than a married man.

True, many of the non-coms, and even “straight-duty bucks,” *were* Benedicts, for various reasons best known to themselves. But Ellis, forever mindful of the old fable of “The fox who lost his tail in a trap,” only laughed aside cynically all their feeble, joking admonitions to him to join their ranks and, taking “Punch’s” advice instead, “didn’t.”

Why had that cursed old frump come butting in? “Only a policeman!” . . . And with an angry snort at the remembrance of those snobbish words Ellis unconsciously rammed the spurs into poor, unoffending Johnny, who immediately broke in his gait with a sidelong jump which, in its suddenness, nearly unseated him.

The spasmodic jerk of the horse brought Benton to himself again, and with a “There, there, Johnny — you old fool — I didn’t mean to rake you,” he patted and eased that startled animal down to his customary pace.

52 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

"She made a lot of you, didn't she, Johnny? And you know you liked it!"

He rambled on, for latterly — in the utter loneliness of his long patrols — the Sergeant had contracted the strange habit of talking aloud to his horse, and Johnny's sensitive ears would prick backwards and forwards as if he thoroughly comprehended what was being said to him.

Traveling easily, and in no particular hurry, Benton made "Marshall's" for dinner, and towards evening drew in sight of Cherry Creek district, with its few scattered ranches and mixed farms.

When about half a mile from his detachment, some objects strewn on the trail ahead attracted his attention which, on drawing near, took the form of pieces of paper, some spilt chicken-feed and flour, bits of board, and the tail-board of a wagon; also, had he but noticed it, a lot of scattered nails.

With a grim chuckle he passed on. "Looks like somebody's had a smash-up," he muttered. Suddenly he pulled Johnny up sharply, for the latter had begun to limp perceptibly on the off-forefoot and, on examination, Ellis found a nail deeply embedded at the side of the frog. He tried to pry it out with his fingers and a knife, but it was in up to the head and his attempts were useless.

"No help for it, Johnny," he said. "You'll have to stick it till we get home," and with a disgusted malediction at the ill-luck, he wended his way slowly ahead on foot, Johnny following on three legs like a lame dog.

On arrival at their destination the nail was eventually extracted with the aid of pincers, and after

bathing and syringing the bleeding prod with hot water and peroxide of hydrogen, the horse moved easier; but Ellis was well aware that several days, perhaps a week, would elapse before it would be safe to use him. And with the knowledge of this fact oppressing him came also the realization that, should anything turn up in the meantime, he would be under the necessity of borrowing a horse from some one.

Stationed in a new district, he was naturally chary of placing himself under obligation to anybody; so, cogitating over his predicament, he watered, fed, and groomed Johnny and, after fixing up the wounded foot in a hot poultice for the night, he retired into his own domain to cook some supper.

The detachment, originally a ranch dwelling, was a square, solid-looking, log-built structure, with a commodious stable in the rear, and a corral and a fenced-in pasture. A huge, bleached buffalo skull, with its stubby black horns — a relic of bygone years — frowned down from over the main entrance, and a faded, weather-flapped Union Jack hung from a short flag-staff at one pinnacle of the roof. With whitewashed stones, the letters R.N.W.M.P. were formed in the earth banking on the front side of the dwelling. The interior bespoke its occupant's tidiness and orderly habits.

One entered directly into a moderate-sized room that was severe in its sparsely furnished simplicity. A long, bench-like table, covered with a tartan police rug, on which were some neatly piled blank legal forms, and books, a Bible, and writing materials. A plain oak arm-chair for the said table, and several smaller ones, with a couple of form-seats, were

54 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

ranged around the walls, and immediately facing the magisterial bench a strongly-built cell with a barred door and aperture was partitioned off. A few enlarged framed photographs of old-time police and legal celebrities and a green baize-covered board decorated with an assortment of brightly burnished leg-irons and handcuffs completed the adornment of the chamber. Nevertheless, in spite of the room's simple aspect, one instinctively guessed that here, as occasion occurred, the solemnity of the Law was upheld with no less a dignity than in the highest court of justice.

A door at one side of the cell opened into a larger apartment, evidently used as a combined living and bedroom which, with its strange collection of interesting objects, was typically significant of its owner's tastes and personality. A comfortable, bachelor-like abode this, yet slightly regimental withal too; for the blankets at the head of the cot were strapped into the regulation neat roll with the sheets in the center, whilst above, on a small shelf, were the folded spare uniform and Stetson hat, on either side of which stood a pair of high, brown Strathcona riding-boots with jack spurs attached. On pegs underneath hung the "Sam Browne" belt and holster containing the heavy "Colt's .45" Service revolver, together with a bridle, a head-rope, and a slicker. Two or three easy chairs were scattered around and some tanned calf-skin mats covered the floor. A table stood in the center, littered with periodicals and other reading matter, and a plain slung bookshelf held a well-worn selection of classical and modern works of fiction. The walls were relieved with va-

rious photographs, clever pen-and-ink sketches, and unframed copies of famous pictures, among which were several examples of Charles Russell's and Frederick Remington's works of art. A tent-pegging lance, standing in a corner, supported a gaudy, feathered Indian headdress on its point, while behind the door hung a set of boxing gloves.

Five years of Benton's wandering life having been spent on the veldt—two of them passed in the Chartered Company's service—accounted for the curious South African trophies that were noticeable here and there. A stuffed *meerkat* crouched half raised, like a gigantic gopher, and that ugly bald-headed vulture, known in the *Taal* as an *aasvogel*, looked down with un pitying eyes. Two magnificent leopard skin karosses were flung over the arm-chairs, and a Zulu oxhide war shield was suspended in an angle of the walls, flanked crosswise with its companion weapons—a heavy knob-kerrie and a short, broad-bladed, stabbing assegai, whilst above hung those one-time sinister symbols of authority north of the Vaal—a rhinoceros-hide *sjambok*, a Mauser rifle, and a captured "*Vierkleur*" flag. Adjoining this room were the kitchen and a small compartment used as a storehouse.

His supper finished, and the daily diary, mileage report, and "monthly returns" made out, the Sergeant lit a pipe and lay back in one of the arm-chairs, lazily scanning the various criminal photographs in the last copy of *The Detective* he had brought with him from the Post, until drowsiness overcoming him, the paper fluttered to the floor and his head sank back against the leopard skin. The

56 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

rays of the lamp shone full on the strong, moody face, with the pipe still held clenched between the teeth, and the athletic frame which, even in repose, contrived somehow to convey in its posture an impression of instinctive, feline readiness for sudden action.

Indeed, the man's whole appearance seemed to fittingly bear out the many strange stories that were current of his strenuous and eventful past.

CHAPTER V

*The elder was quelled,
But the younger rebelled;
So he spread out his wings and fled over the sea.
Said the jackdaws and crows,
"He'll be hanged I suppose,
But what in the deuce does that matter to we?"*

HENRY KINGSLEY

THE second son of an English cavalry officer holding a high rank, young Benton's life up to the age of fifteen — with the exception of a few escapades at Shrewsbury — which were due more to an ingrained hardihood than viciousness, had passed very much the same as that of any other well-bred public school boy.

The death of his mother, however, and the later advent of a step-parent, wrought a disastrous change in the boy's hitherto happy enough life. His step-mother's intolerance with his high spirits led to many family quarrels and finally had the effect of provoking a naturally wayward temper to open rebellion and a definite course of action.

Her studied, unremitting hostility towards the boy succeeded in arousing in him a bitter, lasting hatred for her which, in its intensity and fixity of purpose, was positively awesome and well-nigh incredible in one of his years.

Scorning to follow his elder brother's example in meekly submitting to the new régime he turned, in his misery and distress, to an old friend of his dead

58 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

mother's, one — Major Carlton — his ofttime confidant and mediator in many boyish troubles.

Borrowing fifty pounds from the latter, and taking little else save his mother's photograph and a few clothes, with a farewell to none except his debtor, he turned his back on that beautiful old Devonshire home forever.

A youthful imagination inspired, perhaps, by prolific and intelligent reading, inexplicably directed his course to the United States; so, booking his passage at Liverpool, he found himself later, depleted in money — but not in pluck or resolution — a waif in that vast assemblage of mixed peoples. One letter — the last that he was ever to write home — he despatched to his father.

Sir John Benton's fierce, lined face softened for an instant as he perused his son's missive, but it grew darker and drearier than ever before he had read it through. The letter said no word of return, and he guessed rightly it was meant for an absolutely final farewell.

A strict disciplinarian in his own household, its contents he never divulged to the rest of the family; and if he felt the loss of the manly, headstrong boy, he never showed it hereafter by word or deed. The stern old soldier recognized in those lines — penned with a certain boyish courtesy — only too well the inflexible characteristics that matched, to the full, his own.

Various vicissitudes eventually landed young Benton in a great cattle-raising district of Montana, where he obtained a job as a chore boy on a big ranch, known as the "Circle H." A fearless up-

bringing amongst horses stood him now in good stead, and this, combined with a willing capacity for work, ultimately won for him the approval of "Big Jim Parsons," the silent, laconic ranch foreman, who befriended the lonely, and now taciturn, youngster.

It is not to be supposed that he gained this patronage any too easily. Although babbling little concerning his history, his English speech and apparent breeding were sufficient at the start to make him the butt of many doubtful pleasantries from the devil-may-care cow-punchers whose bunkhouse victim he was. No sulker, he could assimilate the most of it in good part; but there were limitations to such "joshing," as many of his tormentors found out when the savage, uncontrollable Benton temper blazed forth with such appalling venom of fist and tongue that, immature youth though he was, caused the bleeding and cursing authors of the disturbance to retreat aghast at the devil they had raised. The old Mosaic law—"An eye for an eye"—with its grim suggestion of unforgiving finality, always found in Ellis an ardent and exacting adherent.

At such scenes Big Jim would generally appear on the field of hostilities, a threatening, nasal sneer twisting his morose face.

"Quit monkey'n with that kid, now," he would snarl; and with rising wrath: "I tell yu', fer guts, that same dude maverick has yu' all skinned! What was it he called yu', Windy? . . . Will yore mother stand fer that? . . . What's happened to yore face, Ike? . . . Fell down an' trod on it?"

The foreman's rough championing, and his own ability to take care of himself, in course of time

60 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

discouraged this systematic baiting, and ere long he received the degree of comradeship. Possessing an inborn love for music, which from childhood up his mother had always sedulously encouraged, Ellis was a pianist of no mean ability. This, coupled with a sweet, boyish voice — which in later years was to develop into a magnificent baritone — caused him to be in constant request as a performer on the battered old piano which the ranch-owner's dwelling boasted. Nothing loath, he played and sang to them the simple old melodies and songs that they knew; and soon from being the ranch butt he became one of its especial favorites.

With characteristic honor, although the loan had been but a mere trifle to the wealthy giver, his first laudable ambition had been to pay back to Major Carlton the sum he had borrowed from that kind-hearted bachelor on emigrating; and this, with much self-denial, he found himself able to do during the next two years, thereafter keeping up a desultory correspondence with his old friend which lasted until the latter's death.

Time went on, and Ellis, after drifting here and there through Montana and Wyoming punching for various cattle outfits, finally returned to the "Circle H," where at the early age of twenty-five he became its competent young foreman — vice "Big Jim Parsons," deceased.

By this time, his character, like his frame, was set; to the vehement ambition and ardor of youth had succeeded the cool, matured resolution of manhood — powerful to will, prompt to execute, and patient to endure; he was proof against idle hopes, no less

than against groundless fears, and the common chagrins of life took no more hold of his soul than toil or privation of his body. Yet under all this case-hardness, like a virgin pearl lying dormant within its flinty habitation, there still remained deep in him a certain softness of heart that he inherited from the gentle lady whose picture and loving memory he had cherished throughout his wanderings.

It is not to be supposed that during all this time the rough associations and surroundings compatible with the calling he followed had not left their mark upon him. But hot-blooded, violent and impulsive though he was by nature, a certain quaint cynicism and command of will and feature enabled him to suppress outwardly these visible signs of his temperament. His life was probably not much more immune from vice than the majority of his fellows who bore themselves more jovially and noisily; but of the sin of violated love, or cruel desertion — too often associated with the sowing of youth's wild oats — he could not accuse himself. The dark eyes of more than one ranch beauty had looked approvingly — perhaps lovingly — on the somber, handsome face and slimly-powerful frame of the reckless young bronco-buster, wondering, half-pityingly, what should make so youthful a countenance so stern. And more than once the inviting loneliness of many whom ties bound had been made only too apparent for his benefit. But the remnants of a nearly forgotten family pride, rather than shyness or coldness, kept Ellis's feet clear of the snares. He was not specially cold, or continent, or tender of conscience, but he chose to take his pleasure in places where he trou-

62 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

bled no man's peace, and where there could be no ignominious aftermath to torture him with its useless, heart-aching remorse.

Every wayfarer through this world must needs encounter certain points in his journey where the main trail divides. For awhile the two tracks may run so near to each other that they may seem still almost one, but they will diverge more and more till, ere they end, their issues lie as widely apart as those of good and evil, light and darkness, life and death. So it was now with Ellis Benton, for a chance episode occurred in that young man's life which was fated to bring about a material change in his fortunes and surroundings.

A born fighter, and possessing unusual cleverness with his hands, he was one night unavoidably forced into an encounter with a professional prize-fighter on a public street, in Butte. A young girl, whom the latter was persecuting with his unwelcome attentions, appealed to the young cow-puncher for protection, and not in vain. Despite the terrible punishment he received, the deadly fury and ability with which he finally put his formidable antagonist away made a visible impression on a well known fight promoter who happened to witness the affray. That worthy, an ex-pugilist himself of considerable renown, with his glib tongue, apparent sincerity, and cleverly framed appeals to the younger man's vanity, succeeded at last in inducing him to enter the ring in earnest. Ellis, in that unsettled period that comes in most strong men's lives, was perhaps, too, subconsciously getting a little weary of the range life that up to now had entirely satisfied his full-blooded

energies, but there is little doubt that had he remained with the soberer calling that he had followed so long, it would have been more advantageous to both his profit and honor. But the reckless hardihood, ingrained in his nature, stifled the suggestions of prudence and ambition; when he cut himself adrift from family and friends he severed himself, in intent, no less decisively from the class in which he was born and bred than if, as an heir to a throne, he had relinquished his birthright, and become but a humble subject. With a characteristic indifference to possible consequences, he was not the least ashamed, as yet, of the doubtful profession that he had adopted. His subsequent spectacular fighting speedily demonstrated his ability to become a future middleweight champion, and for a while the bouts in which he participated drew eager crowds, curious to see the coming young pugilist who gave them such a good run for their money, invariably drawing with, or putting away his opponent each time, with a sensational class of fighting that was highly gratifying to their taste. Becoming gradually disgusted with the crooked practises and propositions which, somehow, seemed to be inseparable from the game, and more or less incumbent on those who were dependent on the ring for a living, he made up his mind to forsake the profession which demanded of him the sacrifice of his common honesty. His commendable decision, however, certainly did not carry with it the solace of much pecuniary acquisition; for although fighting with great frequency, and winning, or splitting many big purses during his brilliant, if brief, career, the fast life and

64 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

heavy expenses compatible with such a profession soon dissipated them along with a considerable portion of his previously accumulated savings, limiting the sum total of his worldly wealth to less than a thousand dollars.

Becoming, by now, thoroughly restless and inclined to wander afresh, his fancy next took him to South Africa, where he obtained a position in the Chartered Company's service, at which occupation he remained until the outbreak of the South African War two years later. Enlisting then as a private in a well known, and afterwards famous, Irregular Horse, in the later engagements at Elandslaagte, Waggon Hill, and Wepener, he showed to the full the soldierly instincts, only natural in one come of his fighting race and breeding, at the latter action, particularly, when in the storming of a strong Boer position, he exhibited a characteristic courage of such an utterly reckless, desperate nature, that subsequently gained for him the Distinguished Conduct Medal and a Sergeant-Major's promotion.

During the terrible Mauser fire, however, which well nigh decimated his squadron, he received a bullet through the body, the same passing the base of the right lung, luckily without permanently injuring that vital organ. On recovery, he served throughout the succeeding guerilla warfare until peace was proclaimed at Vereeniging, on May 31, 1902. Wearying, then, of South Africa and its war-ravaged desolation, he returned to the country and scenes of his former life, resuming his avocation, riding for a newly-formed cattle company, whose headquarters were near the Canadian border.

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 65

Here, during the next few months, he became acquainted with various members of the scattered posts of the Royal North West Mounted Police. Craving companionship, and with the recollections of his late military experiences still fresh within him, he joined that Force, and after passing through the inevitable curriculum of their headquarters at Regina, he was eventually transferred to L Division.

Several notable stock-stealing cases, in which his fearless ability and previous range experience enabled him to obtain long term convictions on the offenders, soon brought him under the favorable notice of his superiors, who recognized his worth in this particular line, and in a little less than four years he was promoted to the rank in which we find him in the beginning of this story.

CHAPTER VI

*Whoo-oh! — Steady! . . . Let's git me cigarette lit!
Oh, a cow-puncher's curse on that frizzling sun!
There! . . . Whoop! . . . Go to her, goldarn it!
Yu' dirty, mean, locoed old son of a gun!"*

BRONCO-BUSTER'S CHORUS

MORNING came, and with it a visit from one, Gallagher, a middle-aged bachelor, his nearest neighbor, whose ranch lay about a mile distant. The Sergeant, seated outside the door, in the sun, smoking an after-breakfast pipe, greeted the newcomer civilly as he lowered himself stiffly out of the saddle, and waited for the other to divulge his business.

Nature had not been kind to Mr. Gallagher in regard to his physiognomy, and Ellis, whenever he contemplated that homely visage, from certain canine peculiarities therein, always mentally labeled him "Old Dog-face." It *was* an ugly, repellant countenance in a way, but the eyes were those of an honest man, and the thick lips expressed a species of genial humor.

Meeting each other casually at the usual weekly mail gatherings, Benton was always conscious of a kind of surly friendliness on Gallagher's part, that showed up in marked contrast to the silent, mistrustful antipathy, with which many of those present generally regarded him; which attitude, be it remarked,

worried the Sergeant but little. The rancher broached the subject of his visit with little preamble.

"Old man Tucker, from Fish Creek, was over wantin' to see yu' yesterday, Sargint. Didn't find yu' in, so he come around to my place before he went back."

"Oh," said Ellis absently, and with a slight trace of weary irritation in his tones; "what's bitin' that old fool now — was he full?"

It was curiously noticeable that, when back amidst the habitues and surroundings of his former life and calling, how naturally he reverted to the terse, ungrammatical speech of the range.

Gallagher, with a grin, lit his pipe, and leaning back in the chair that the Sergeant had dragged out for him, blew out a cloud of smoke reflectively.

"Well, he weren't what you'd call exactly sober," he drawled. "It was the same old business. . . . Says there's some of them a layin' to run off that bunch o' hawsses o' his. Reckons he's got it straight this time."

"He always has," responded the policeman, spitting with contemptuous remembrance. "I'm just about fed up with his picayune happenings. He makes me tired. Time and again he's got me a chasin' over to his place, and there's never nothin' doin'. . . . Just some gag they've bin a throwin' into him."

The other was silent for a space. "Mebbe," he acquiesced musingly. "But I don't know, Sargint . . . he seemed more worked up this time'n I ever see him."

Ellis pondered over this dilemma. A complaint

68 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

was a complaint, and anyhow, no one could ever accuse him of neglecting his duty.

"See here; look," he said presently. "I'd go on over and see what's worryin' that old *soor*, but fact is, I'm stuck for a hawss. That black o' mine went lame on me comin' home last night. Picked up a nail. He won't be fit to ride for three or four days. Got anythin' in yore bunch yu' could fix me up with till he gets sound again, Gallagher?"

The rancher considered a moment or two with a grave, inscrutable face. "Let's see," he said thoughtfully, the corners of his mouth twitching ever so little. "I guess," he broke out finally. "Will yu' come on over, Sargint?"

An hour later Benton, perched on the top rail of Gallagher's horse corral, lazily watched that worthy driving in his band of horses from their range in a neighboring coulee and, slipping down on their near approach, he opened the gate and then effaced himself out of their sight carefully, to prevent a possible scare.

Well strung out, with heads up and manes and tails flying, they followed their leader, a powerfully-built, buckskin gelding. It was an old, well-known trail to them and, presently, with customary obedience, they surged through the opening into the big main corral, where they stood around, a playfully biting, kicking mass of horseflesh, while their owner, bringing up the rear, dismounted from his quiet old cow-pony and hung up the gate behind them. Ellis, emerging from his hiding-place, climbed up beside him on the fence, and together the two men gazed silently awhile at the animated scene below them.

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 69

There were perhaps about thirty head all told, of different grades, ages, and colors, from the heavy Percheron-bred draught-horse to the slender, cat-like cayuse.

Benton, with the eye of a connoisseur of horse-flesh, quickly ran them over. "Pretty mixed bunch," he mumbled, ungraciously.

"Well, yu' ain't buyin' 'em, Sargint," answered Gallagher, somewhat nettled at the other's remark, and a silence ensued which was finally broken by Ellis "shooing" at a big Clyde-built mare, heavy in foal, that was hiding another horse from his view. The startled animal slowly waddled away, disclosing the aforementioned buckskin, which had somehow escaped the Sergeant's notice.

He quickly appraised its points. "Eyah," he muttered; "now *that's* some horse!"

And indeed his approval was justified for it was about as likely a looking specimen of the saddle-remount as one could wish to see, with the short, strong back, long, springy fetlocks, and powerful quarters that denoted speed and endurance no less than an easy gait.

"That sorrel ain't a bad looker, either," he pursued. "Are they saddle-broke, them two?"

"Yep," said Gallagher shortly. "Yu' kin take yore pick, Sargint, of anythin' that's in here."

Benton, shading his eyes from the sun, scrutinized the two horses a little longer and then, leisurely dropping to the ground, slid into the saddle of Gallagher's waiting horse.

"Guess I'll have to borrow yore saddle and bridle a space, old-timer, if yu' don't mind," he re-

70 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

marked. "Lord, but yu' must be split to the chin. I'll have to take these stirrups up a hole or two."

Quickly unlacing the rawhide thongs, he adjusted them to his liking and, tying the horse's halter-shank to the corral, unshipped the heavy stock-saddle and bridle, depositing them on the ground beside the fence.

The rancher's high-heeled Kansas boots, with their huge-rowelled Mexican spurs, next attracted his attention and he stood for a moment silently eyeing them and his own broad-welted, flat-heeled footwear.

"What size boots d'yu' wear, Gallagher?" he inquired, with a mild grin. "Nines, eh? . . . same as me. D'yu' mind changin'? I'm sure on the borrowin' stunt all right this trip, but them stirrups of yores ain't none too wide an' I don't much fancy gettin' 'hung up.'"

The other acquiesced willingly enough and the exchange was soon effected. Unstrapping the lariat from off the saddle, Benton climbed up and dropped inside the corral, the horses beginning immediately to circle around uneasily at his approach, raising clouds of dust.

"Which 'un yu' goin' to take, Sargent?" inquired their owner.

"Guess I'll try out that buckskin first!" Ellis answered laconically. "I wanta hold him and that sorrel. We'll let the others drift."

Standing in the center of the corral, with an ease that bespoke long practise, he slowly shook out a workable loop and began to adroitly maneuver the buckskin to the rear of the bunch. But the latter,

scenting danger, and being apparently an old hand at the game, was very elusive, diving head-down into the ruck always at the psychological moment. Patiently watching his chance as, for about the twentieth time the buckskin's head reappeared amidst the flying manes, the Sergeant carelessly, with a curious overhand flip, swung and threw, the noose dropping fairly over the ears and nose.

Tailing onto the rope, with heels digging into the soft ground, he slid for a few yards, then suddenly detaching the animal from the retreating bunch with a powerful hip-heave he brought it up facing him.

Gallagher watched the performance with a lazy curiosity. "Knows his business with a rope all right," was his silent comment.

Once caught, as Benton coiled in the slack, hand over hand, the buckskin walked meekly up to his captor like one who knows the game is up, and allowed himself to be patted. Leaving Gallagher to hold the animal, Ellis proceeded to cut the sorrel into a small inner corral. This done, he opened the gate once more, and with a wild whirl and surge that scattered clouds of dust the late occupants eagerly streamed out on the run back to their range again.

Carrying the blanket, saddle, and bridle, the Sergeant entered the corral and cautiously approaching the held horse, deftly slipped the bit between its teeth and buckled the throat-lash firmly, then, drawing off the lariat, picked up the blanket and flopped it over the withers with a smack. The saddle next followed suit; the double cinches, although slapping the animal's belly with the same delib-

72 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

erate roughness, failed to produce any startling effect.

"Seems gentle," Benton muttered aloud.

"Yep," assented Gallagher, in a toneless voice.

"Better take th' sorrel, Sargint."

Ellis glanced up sharply, but the rancher's face was set like an ugly, expressionless mask, and he gleaned nothing there.

"Why?" he inquired.

"Pitches some," said the other drily and, with calculating inference, "the sorrel, he's gentle. *I* kin ride *him*."

Ellis hesitated a moment. He was hardly to be classed in the same category as a greenhorn, whom ignorance, taunt, or bravado will often provoke into climbing onto a bad horse, with equally bad results, but his reputation as a rider was at stake, for he knew Gallagher's tongue was prone to wag at times. The latter's last words — "The sorrel, *he's* gentle!" — rankled a little, and his decision was made with an unconscious snort of contempt, as he dragged at the latigo straps and drew the cinches taut.

"Pitches, does he?" he mumbled to himself. All right, then! He would show Mr. "Dog-face" Gallagher something. And bending down he buckled on the big, straight-shanked, Mexican spurs. "Gimme yore quirt, Gallagher!"

Crossing the split reins carefully in the palm of his left hand and catching the cheek-strap of the bridle, he reached out his right and guided his foot cautiously into the stirrup, eyeing the buckskin closely the while. The animal stood ominously quiet. Grasping the horn he swung lightly and

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 73

warily into the saddle and settled his feet home. Still no movement from the motionless horse. Vaguely uneasy, he clucked and gave it a light touch with the spurs. The effect was magical. The ears suddenly flattened. A ripple ran along the black-striped back and as, with a hoarse, grunting scream the buckskin dropped its head and bucked into the air, in a flash Benton realized that he was on one of the worst horses it had ever been his lot to tackle.

"Oh — o-oo — he-e — s-ss — a-ah!" in bitter bodily anguish, he groaned, as again and again the horse rocketed and propped, stiff and hard with terrible impact, and with a jarring side-shake that seemed to shiver his very soul. The blood burst from his nose and mouth under the constant violent concussions and he felt deathly sick. Still the snapping, whalebone-like back rose and descended, "sun-fishing" in midair with a curious upward flirt of the rump that was well-nigh irresistible, causing the Sergeant's hand to swing up towards the horn more than once, and but for the fact of Gallagher watching, he would have "pulled leather" without shame. "Not grain fed. . . . Can't keep this up much longer!" he gasped to himself. And shifting slightly in the saddle he threw all his dead weight on to the nigh fore-leg. It was an old trick that Ellis had often used in his younger and more elastic days, and by degrees he became conscious between the twisting, jerking leaps of the bucking fury under him, that the animal was weakening.

Its resistance provoked a wild, unreasoning wave of anger to surge through him, driving the remnants

74 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

of his sick faintness before it, and raising his hand he quirted and raked the still pitching buckskin with a ferocity that finally drove it to a sweating standstill.

"Go to it, d—n yu'!" he yelled, but the horse had had enough and only broke into an easy trot around the corral. Swinging out of the saddle, he stood for a moment swaying, dazed from the terrific ordeal he had undergone.

To him came Gallagher. "Holy doodle!" exclaimed that worthy, with a sort of miserable heartiness, "he sure went after yu' some!"

The policeman did not answer, but breathing in deep, heavy gasps, and streaming with perspiration, slowly raised his head. At the unmistakable silent animosity depicted on that drawn, bitter face, the rancher changed countenance and retreated slightly with a deprecating gesture.

"Now don't yu' go for to blame me, Sargint!" he began. "— 'member I warned yu'!"

Ellis looked at him loweringly, with evil irresolution. The man was right, he reflected, but nothing makes us so unforgiving as the consciousness of being in the wrong.

"Warned me?" he echoed, with a mirthless laugh, and at the same time blowing a stream of blood from his nose. "Oh, aye, yu' *warned* me all right — like Paddy warned his landlord" . . . !

Regaining his breath somewhat, he resumed with savage ill-humor. "Yu've an ugly mug, Gallagher. . . . If I thought for a minute yu'd handed me this here stick of dynamite for a josh, I'd push what's meant to be yore face right in, an' don't yu' forget it!"

The other's dog-like visage contracted with a grin and he emitted a short, barking laugh.

"Easy! easy there, Sargint! . . . Now don't yu' start for to get mad 'bout it," he chuckled. "Never yu' mind my mug. I ain't a beauty, I know. . . . But handsome is that handsome does. . . . 'Member, I'm lendin' yu' a horse."

At the remembrance of the man's generosity, and his good-natured response, Benton's short-lived fit of bad temper quickly evaporated, and he felt guilty and ashamed at his own illogical outburst.

"Gallagher," he said hoarsely, spitting out a mouthful of blood and dust, "I guess I'm in wrong. . . . I take it all back."

With an earnestness that there was no mistaking, the rancher reached out his hand.

"Sargint," he said solemnly, "shake. Yu're a rider." And in the warmth of that grip Ellis became vaguely conscious that his nerve had won for him a friend.

Good fellowship established once more, Gallagher's taciturnity vanished and he became voluble and communicative.

"Now, see here, look; I'll tell yu', Sargint," he rambled on. "I raised that hawss, an' I know him like a book. There's only two men ever stayed with him. They're no-goods, both of 'em, but they kin *ride*. Yu' know 'em, too — 'Short an' Dirty's' one, an' that there Jules Le Frambois yu've just took down for rustlin' Billy Jacques' stock, t'other. Jules — he got piled higher'n a kite, first crack outer th' box, but he stayed with him th' second trip. Wanst he finds a feller kin ride him he quits pitchin' right

76 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

away *with* that feller — for good. Yu' git on him now an' see 'f I ain't right."

Ellis did so and, with a rough slap of the quirt and a thrust of the spurs, thumbing the horse's withers and fanning its ears with his hat; but all his efforts to make the buckskin hump again were fruitless, and the Sergeant, as he felt the surge of the easy-gaited, powerful animal under him, knew that here was a remount that could be depended on in any emergency.

"What'd I tell yu'?" said Gallagher, as Benton dismounted and off-saddled. "Nary a jump — an' Short an' Dirty, he rode him for three months — an' he says he's good on th' rope an'll stand wherever his lines is dropped. Now yu' take him and ride him as long as yu' want, Sargint. . . . I guess there ain't nobody else around here as is anxious," he added, grinning. "What's his name? Why, I calls him 'Shakem.' He's sure shook a few of 'em, too. I didn't aim to get yu' hurt none, but some of th' boys had it that yu' used to bust for th' 'Turkey-Track,' an', well, I kinder own I was a bit minded to see if yu' shaped like it," he ended whimsically.

The ghost of a smile for a moment illuminated Benton's blood-stained, tired face as, lighting a cigarette, he retrieved his own boots and prepared to lead his borrowed mount away.

"An' are yu' satisfied?" he queried wearily.

"Aye," answered the rancher, with fervent conviction. "I sure am that. Yes, I'll ride on over an' fix up that black o' yores if yu're away th' night. So long, Sargint."

CHAPTER VII

*"Oh, sheriff an' ranger both wished me luck,
Yu' bet! when I jumped th' Line last Fall —
Yep! . . . Kind that a hog gets when he's stuck,
For I'd cert'nly made them cattle-men bawl.
Them fellers has cause to love me as much
As they do a wolf, or a sneakin' Piute;
But wouldn't this jar yu'—' gettin' in Dutch'
With th' Mounted Police, thru' a mangey coyote?"*

THE RUSTLER'S LAMENT

AFTER giving the buckskin a light feed of grain and attending to Johnny's hoof carefully, Ellis despatched an early lunch, saddled up Shakem, and struck out for Tucker's ranch, which was about eight miles distant. It was a glorious day and, feeling fully recovered from the effects of his morning's shake-up, he rode slowly on through the golden haze with that ease and contentment that comes to a man who feels that he has earned it, and has sound health and a good horse under him.

Three miles or so beyond Gallagher's the trail veered slightly west, then south, skirting the dense brush and timbered slopes of the foot-hills. Emerging from a patch of poplar that fringed the base of a small butte around which his trail led, a moving object suddenly appeared above him, sharply defined against the sky-line. Glancing up quickly he instantly recognized the tawny-gray, dog-like form of a coyote. Benton, in common with most range

78 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

men, loathed the slinking, carrion-fed brutes and always shot them down remorselessly whenever opportunity offered. Averting his gaze and still keeping steadily on his way to deceive the wary animal, he cautiously lifted the flap of his holster with the intention of making a quick whirl and snap-shot. With shortened lines, he was just about to execute this maneuver when something strange and unfamiliar in the actions of his intended victim suddenly caused him to halt, paralyzed with open-mouthed curiosity and astonishment.

Apparently, for the moment, completely heedless of the close proximity of its mortal enemy, Man, it was pawing violently at its snout, and to the Sergeant's ears came the unmistakable sounds of choking and vomiting. Gripping the Colt's .45, Ellis's hand flashed up, but the shell was never discharged. For just then came the sharp crack of a rifle shot from somewhere on the other side of the butte, and the coyote, with a bullet through its head, tumbled and slid, jerking in its death-struggle almost to the horse's feet.

With a startled exclamation at the unexpected occurrence and, wrenching his steed around as it shyed instinctively away, Benton swung out of the saddle and turned wonderingly to examine that still twitching body. A peculiar *something* — evidently the cause of its previous choking motions — was protruding from its mouth and, prying open the clenched, blood-dripping paws, Ellis tugged it out from away back in the throat, down which it had apparently resisted being swallowed. Wiping the slimy object on the grass, he spread it open. His

eyes dilated strangely with instant recognition, and a savage oath burst from him. It was the brand cut out of the hide of a freshly killed steer.

With lightning-like intuition and a quick, apprehensive, upward glance, the Sergeant crumpled up the clammy, half-chewed flap of skin, jammed it up under his stable-jacket and, jumping for the buckskin, wheeled and dashed into the shelter of the bush. Breathing rapidly with excitement, he dismounted and, lying on his stomach, dragged himself cautiously forward until he could discern the dead coyote.

His rapid movements had been only just in time. For, as he peered from his hiding place, another object silhouetted itself against the sky-line. A man, this time, wearing white-goatskin chaps, and in the short, powerful body, red hair, and prognathous jaw, the policeman discerned the all-familiar figure and lineaments of one — William Butlin — generally known in the district by the soubriquet of "Short and Dirty," or "Shorty."

He was coatless, and his bare, brawny arms were blood-stained up to the elbows as, clutching a rifle in one hand and a knife in the other, he slowly descended the incline and inspected the result of his marksmanship. Being summer, it was a poor skin and mangy so, with a muttered oath and a contemptuous kick, he turned and retraced his steps up the butte, with bent head scrutinizing the ground carefully around for something as he did so.

With a grim chuckle, the Sergeant watched him disappear from view and, after waiting a moment or two, quietly raised himself and slid out of his

80 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

place of concealment. Climbing noiselessly until he reached the brow of the incline, he dropped prone and, removing his hat, looked warily down. He found himself looking down a narrow draw, dotted here and there with patches of alder, willow-scrub, and cottonwood clumps — a huge specimen of the latter rising from amongst its fellows at the lower end of the draw. There, at the bottom, not fifty yards distant, Benton beheld Mr. Short and Dirty busily engaged in stripping the hide from the bloody carcass of a newly butchered steer.

He had chosen an ideal spot for his nefarious work, the slopes on either side of the draw rendering him completely immune from ordinary observation, and the hot rays of the overhead sun beat down on the sprawled, glistening, pink and yellow monstrosity that his knife was rapidly laying bare. His rifle lay on the ground, well out of his reach, near his horse, a chunky, well-put-up white animal and, with back turned to the fierce scrutiny of the representative of the Law that followed his every movement, he bent over his work with nervous haste, skinning with long sweeps of his knife and glancing furtively around him from time to time.

With a stealthy movement Ellis arose, stood upright, and walked noiselessly down to the impromptu barbecue.

“ Oh, Shorty! ” he called.

At the policeman's voice the man started violently and, wheeling like a flash, knife in hand, faced him with open-mouthed amazement, fear, guilt, cunning, and desperation flitting in turn over his rugged, evil face. With carelessly-held revolver the Sergeant

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 81

watched him intently with glittering eyes, his attitude suggestive of a snake about to strike.

"Pitch up!" he rapped out harshly.

The other made no move but a terrible spasm of murderous indecision momentarily convulsed his face, which angered the policeman beyond expression.

"*Pronto!*" he roared explosively, with a shocking blasphemy and a forward jump of his gun that sent Shorty's arms aloft with a galvanic jerk, the knife dropping to the ground.

Silently Benton surveyed him awhile, a deadly, menacing light like green fire flaming in his deep-set eyes, and the muscles under the livid scar on his cheek twitching.

"Yu' look at me like that agin," he drawled slowly and distinctly, "an' I'll blow a hole thru' yore guts. Three paces forward, march! — halt! — 'bout turn!"

The movements were executed with a precise obedience that drew forth a sneer from the observant sergeant.

"Huh! an old bird, eh?" he gibed. "Always thought yu' were, from th' cut of yore mug. I guess th' 'Pen' shore went into mourning th' day yu' worked yore ticket. There's a lump on yore hip I don't like," he continued sharply. "Here! Let's go thru' yu'!"

He deftly extracted a revolver, glanced at it quickly, and then transferred it to his own pocket.

"Packin' a Colt's automatic around, eh?" he snarled. "That's another charge I'll soak into yu' — carryin' concealed weapons."

82 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

His swiftly working brain had, meantime, evolved a definite scheme of action that he felt the circumstances required. Never for a moment underrating the notoriously desperate character of his captive, he was taking no chances, and purposely kept that individual under the tense influence of his powerful will, giving him no opportunity to collect his crafty wits.

"Quick, now, my lad!" he broke out in a fierce undertone, seizing the other's shirt collar and pushing the muzzle of the revolver into his back; "step out to that big cottonwood down there — keep yore wings up. Make one break an' this'll go off!"

Bursting with helpless, impotent rage, the cowed and bewildered man was roughly thrust forward to the indicated spot. Arriving there, Ellis jerked out his handcuffs, opening these carefully so that he would be able to manipulate them with one hand.

"Shove out yore mitts on each side of this stick!" came his sharp command.

Shorty blinked at him with feigned stupidity out of veiled, bloodshot eyes.

"Quick!" snapped the Sergeant, with a fresh burst of fury at the other's irresolution. "Quick, yu' sorrel-topped skunk, or I'll kill yu'!"

Sullenly the gory arms were clasped around the tree and the handcuffs clicked home. His man secure, the policeman turned swiftly.

"*Adios*, Shorty," he said, with grim levity. "I'm just takin' a little *paseur* now. I'll be back before the coyotes get yu'."

The rustler gazed after his retreating form with evil wonder. So far he had uttered no sound, but

now his lips framed themselves for speech. Something causing him to change his mind, however, he only spat viciously and resolutely held his peace.

An hour passed. A slow one, too, for the shackled man. Shifting wearily from one foot to the other, he eventually sat down, shoving out a leg on either side of the cottonwood, his arms, of necessity, hugging the butt. The sound of voices presently smote his ear, not unpleasantly either, for by this time he was beyond caring for *what* happened to him so long as he was released from his cramped, ludicrous position. Soon two riders hove into view at the entrance to the draw, and in them he recognized his captor, and — Gallagher.

The sight of the latter vaguely disturbed his warped conscience. Gallagher had always been decent to him, he reflected. Had once even lent him money. How could the policeman know it was Gallagher's steer? He *couldn't*, he argued to himself. They were just trying to put some bluff over him. And the conviction that he still held a trump card hardened his heart.

Pulling up at the dead steer, they dismounted and, leaving Gallagher examining the carcass, Ellis walked on down the draw and released his prisoner, snapping the handcuff back on the wrist again.

"Get yu' over to th' beef an' set down," he ground out curtly.

The rancher looked up at their approach. "Howdy, Shorty," he said quietly, with a grim nod, which salute the other returned sullenly, with a brazen stare, sitting down resignedly, with his manacled hands clasping his knees. Benton, roll-

84 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

ing a cigarette, looked interrogatively at Gallagher.

"Well," he queried.

"Shore *looks* like one o' mine," answered that worthy; "but —"

His speech was suddenly interrupted by the rustler. Throughout his capture he had remained as mute as a trapped wolf. Now he broke in with:

"Yes, but yu' cain't *swear* it's yores." And the sneering taunt conveyed a meaning that was not lost on his listeners.

For a moment or two the Sergeant scanned the faces of the two men, a lazy, tolerant smile playing over his hard features as he fumbled inside the breast of his stable-jacket.

"Oh, he cain't, cain't he?" he drawled mockingly. "No, but *I* can, my strawberry blonde. Here's a letter for yu', Gallagher," he continued, grinning. "Reckon I'll let Shorty read it first, though." And, unfolding the flap of hide, he carelessly held it up for that gentleman's inspection.

With starting eyes and a ghastly imprecation the prisoner gazed at the missing link, fear, anger, and astonishment flitting in turn over his evil visage.

"Why, why —" he stuttered.

"Yes, *why* —" Ellis finished for him sarcastically. "*Why* do yu' aim to start in chokin' poor coyotes to death with other people's brands?"

He handed the sticky piece of evidence over to Gallagher. "Double H.F.," he said. "That's yore brand all right, ain't it, old-timer?"

The rancher nodded wonderingly.

"Yu'll find it fits into th' cut-out all hunkadory," the Sergeant added.

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 85

"Satisfied?" he queried presently. "All right, then." And, in the set formula that the Law prescribes, he proceeded to formally charge and warn his prisoner. This duty ended, he sank down with a lazy yawn and, rolling a fresh cigarette, tossed it good-naturedly over to the captive, with a match along.

"Have a smoke, Shorty," he observed, with an indolent, meaning smile. "I guess yu' shore needs one."

The three men smoked meditatively awhile, amid a silence that was eventually broken by Gallagher.

"Playin' it up kinder mean on me, ain't yu' Shorty?" he remarked bitterly. "I reckon I've always treated yu' white."

The shackled man, with sullen, averted eyes, gave a hopeless shrug.

"Didn't aim to put it over on yu' in particular, Barney," he mumbled in a low voice. "I was just a ridin' past here, casual like, lookin' for some horses, when I see this steer a tryin' to catch up to th' bunch with a broken leg. I kin pay yu' for it," he added defiantly. "An' if yu'—"

"*Payin'* don't go on a job like this," interjected the Sergeant sharply. "Even if Barney *was* willin'. . . . Case is out of his hands. Besides, if yu' can afford to pay for beef yu' ain't obliged to rustle it.

"Broken leg," he continued, with an incredulous grin. "Yes, an' I guess it ain't hard to figure *what* broke it. I've seen th' way yu' rope an' throw—lots of times. *Casual!* What? Oh, mighty bloody *casual!* A skinnin' knife. A block an' tackle an' a butcher's cleaver in a gunny-sack an' that

86 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

big cottonwood to sling th' beef up to out o' reach of th' coyotes till yu' could come around with a wagon an' team for it after dark. What? *Casual*, eh? . . . well, I should smile."

A lull followed this sally. Presently Shorty raised his head.

"My shootin' at that there coyote, it was, I guess, as fetched yu'?" he inquired gloomily. "I was down at th' creek, gettin' a drink, an' when I was comin' back I see him with somethin' in his mouth."

Ellis nodded and blew out a smoke ring with dreamy reflection.

"Aye, that an' other things," he drawled, slowly. "'Member makin' that crack about a certain red-coated, yaller-laigged stiff whose goat yu' was a goin' to get, like th' feller's before him? . . . A little bit — not much — I *don't* think. Yu' ain't got no Corporal Williamson here. I've been a-layin' for yu' ever since, an' now I reckon it's yu' for th' goat."

Gallagher, listening amusedly, uttered his low, barking laugh.

"Goat!" he chuckled softly. "Goat!" The expression seemed to tickle his imagination greatly. "Don't often get it put over yu', Sargint, I'll gamble."

"Oh, I don't know," said Benton lazily. "Do sometimes." He wriggled into a more comfortable position. "Talkin' o' goats," he continued, with a dreamy smile of reflection, "just for th' sake of a yarn I'll give myself away.

"It was two winters back — when I was stationed at Goddard," he began. "I caught a feller there fixin' up another man's calf — all same Shorty, here. I got th' owner to identify th' hide an' locked th'

feller up. Inspector Purvis happened to be down that day inspectin' detachments, so I rustled up another J.P. and got them to commit this gink. I mind his wife came to see him that night, an' kinder out of respect for her feelin's I kept out o' hearin' while they chewed th' rag. Next evenin'—I had a case on durin' th' day—I drives to th' station with him to catch th' eight-thirty East-bound, usin' a wagon an' team I'd borrowed. We had to pass *his* place on th' way, an' he says to me, kinder simple like: 'Corporal,'—I was a corporal then—'I'll most-like be awaitin' trial some time an' I'll be wantin' some clothes. I fixed it up with th' woman last night to have 'em ready when we come past. D'yu' mind stoppin'?' 'All right,' I says, never suspicionin' nothin', for he seemed a sorter homely, foolish kind o' 'mossback.' Sure enough, when we comes opposite his place, out comes his wife with a big, fat gunny-sack. Puts it in th' wagon. Cries, an' kisses him, an' says 'good-by.' It was a bitter cold night, I mind, an' I had my fur coat collar turned up high 'round my face, an' my cap pulled down. Presently, when we was about half ways there, he starts in to groan an' shiver up against me. 'What's up?' I says. 'Cramps,' says he, still groanin'. 'Gosh, but I've got 'em bad.' There was some straw in th' bottom of th' wagon, an' thinkin' it might ease him some if he lay down a bit, I helped him over th' seat into th' box, an' he lay down amongst th' straw, with his gunny-sack for a pillow—*mine*, with th' calfskin exhibit in it, alongside me on th' off-side of th' seat. Havin' cuffs an' leg-shackles on him I knew he wouldn't be fool

88 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

enough to make any kind of a breakaway, especially as he really seemed sick, so I didn't watch him particularly close, an' we jogged along through th' dark. He still seemed pretty bad when we made th' station, so I got him a slug of whiskey an' we boarded th' train. I handed him over at the guardroom, when we got into th' Post — locked up my gunnysack, an' beat it back on th' West-bound that was late that night. I didn't want to be around th' Post next day for fear Mickey, th' S.M., might keep me in for duty. Well, the case came up about three months later at th' Supreme Court.

"Mr. Man hires him a lawyer an' pleads 'not guilty,' as bold as brass. As I figured I had th' case all hunkadory I only had one witness — th' owner of th' calf. I goes into the box an' gives my evidence an' pulls out th' hide exhibit to identify. A red an' white one I'd put in an' a red an' white one I pulls out, but I well-nigh had a fit when I saw th' brand on it. It was th' prisoner's *own*. I looked like a proper fool, I guess, with th' mossback an' his 'mouthpiece' both givin' me th' 'ha, ha.' Luckily for me, Inspector Purvis happened to be in court an' of course his statement that everything had been in order at th' preliminary trial when he committed th' man was accepted by the judge, an' after a hard fight with th' defending counsel — who, of course, wanted to proceed right then an' there — we got th' case set over, an' started in to investigate. 'Twasn't much use, though. They — th' prisoner, his wife, an' th' lawyer — put it all over us — easy. Yes, *sir*, they had th' bulge on us, all right, an' they knew

it. Case was dismissed at its second hearing through lack of evidence — th' judge intimating, however, that he was satisfied that there'd been some funny work somewhere, though, under th' circumstances he had no alternative but to give th' prisoner th' benefit of th' doubt. Th' O.C., Purvis, an' th' lawyer, well-nigh crucified me with their remarks. Been mighty careful ever since, yu' bet!

"A constable named Mason nailed him later, though, for stealing a horse. He had him dead to rights an' made a better job of things than me. My 'rube' got three years. I had charge of th' escort when we took him, along with some others, up to th' 'Pen.' It was then that he told me the whole business. He'd fixed it up with his wife th' night she come to see him in th' cells. When she came out with that gunny-sack, she'd put one of their own calf-hides in on top of his clothes. That's what made th' sack look so big. How in h—l he ever managed to snake *my* sack from alongside me on th' seat — without me feelin' him — swop them two hides, an' then put it back again, was a corker, but he managed it, somehow, an' dropped th' real 'un on th' trail, where his wife, followin' us up in th' dark on a saddle-horse, snaffled it an' took it home in quick shape an' burnt it."

This story, delivered with the Sergeant's characteristic humorous, arrogant abruptness, caused his listeners — in spite of the gravity of the circumstances attending its telling — considerable amusement. It was a curious anecdote for a man to relate of himself, especially in the midst of the some-

what grim situation under which they were met, but it was quite in keeping with Benton's strange, complex character.

The three men lay silent awhile after this, each busy with his own reflections. Presently Gallagher, who was gazing absently at the scar on the policeman's cheek, said quietly:

"It was yu' killed 'Slim' Cashell, over to Pitman, wasn't it, Sargint?"

At the question the lazy good humor died out of Benton's face strangely. Bleak and inscrutable became his expression on the instant—lowering and sinister. His far-away, ruthless eyes began to glow with their peculiar baleful light. It was the sun suddenly enveloped by a storm-cloud.

"Aye," he said darkly, and a long pause ensued. "It was me or him," he went on, in a cold, even, passionless voice. "An' my way o' thinkin' *an'* actin' at such show-downs is th' same, I reckon, as old Israel Hands'—a certain gentleman o' fortune in a book I guess yu've never read, Barney. . . . 'Him as strikes first is my fancy; dead men don't bite; them's my views—amen, so be it.' . . . He had his chance, anyway, an' he left me his card, which I'll pack to my grave," he ended significantly, touching the scar.

The flies began to buzz around the carcass and the steady "munch, munch" of the feeding horses sounded in their ears, whilst the sun, blazing hotly down upon them without the mercy of a cooling breeze, sent up little shimmering heat-waves from the sagebrush-dotted parched ground. Shorty presently found his voice again.

"Sargint," he began, with a certain surly respect that it was noticeable had hitherto been omitted, "d'yu' mind me askin' yu' a question?"

Ellis glanced at him indifferently, his deep-set gray eyes wide with their peculiar, aggressive blank stare.

"Go ahead — what is it?" he said.

Shorty licked his dry lips. "Was it Jules le Frambois as told yu' 'bout —?"

"No," interrupted Ellis irritably. "Jules told me nothin', an' I asked him nothin'; an' what's more, I'd see yu' an' him ten fathoms deep in h—l before I'd suck up any of yu' Ghost River crooks' cursed lies."

"Were it George Fisk, then — or Scotty Robbins?" the other pursued.

A puzzling, suspicious thought suddenly flashed into the policeman's alert brain at the man's persistence, and instantly his face became an inscrutable mask.

"Now yu're talkin'," he answered meaningly.

His words produced a horrible change in the weather-beaten, sinister countenance of his prisoner.

"By —, I was a-thinkin' so. . . . Right from th' fust crack," he said spitefully, with an oath. "An' now I'll tell yu' somethin' that ain't no lie. Them two same fellers has it fixed to annex old Bob Tucker's bunch o' hawsses — tomorrer night. I was a-goin' to give 'em a hand, too," he continued defiantly, with reckless abandon. "They figures on takin' 'em up to a place they knows of in th' bush — up Ghost River way — for a spell, till things quietens down a bit, I guess; then they'll drive 'em South, to

92 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

Paralee Junction, an' try an' ship 'em East from there. George Fisk an' me had a sorter diff'runce 'bout whackin' up. He says to me: 'Take it, or leave it!'—them were his words—'Me an' Scotty ain't exactly pertic'lar whether yu' stays in th' family or not,' he says."

He paused for breath. Ellis shot a warning glance that spoke volumes to Gallagher who, with open-mouthed curiosity, was listening eagerly to this amazing recital.

"Well, yu' see they've double-crossed yu', *amigo*," he said, with a calm, convincing composure that left no further doubt in his prisoner's mind.

"Just a frame-up," he continued. "Why, them fellers has good steady jobs punchin' for th' Whar-nock Cattle Company, which they ain't got no intention o' leavin' for to run off anybody's hawsses. They ain't exactly stuck on yu' so, naturally, they figured this was th' easiest way to get rid of yu'."

Shorty spat vindictively, and his pale, lynx-like, merciless eyes glowed as, with horrible blasphemies and threats, he broke out, reviling the two alleged informers.

"Frame-up!" he snarled. "Yes! . . . on me *an'* yu'. Why, this very beef here was for 'em, while they was up cached in the bush. Feller was a-goin' to foller 'em up with it in a wagon. I won't be th' only one to get double-crossed, as yu'll find. Yu'll be gettin' one o' th' worst falls *yu'* ever got in yore natural if yu' turn this whisper o' mine down now. Well, I've told yu', anyways." And, spent with his rage, he lay back like a man weary of life.

The practical Gallagher glanced up at the slowly descending sun and leapt to his feet.

"Time's gettin' on," he said. "I don't figure on losin' that beef, anyways. . . . It's a-stiffenin' up a'ready."

And, picking up Shorty's knife, with practised dexterity, he proceeded to complete what the rustler had begun. Ellis, outwardly nonchalant, but seething inwardly with excitement at the news, the truth of which was confirmed unhesitatingly by a certain native intuition he possessed, lent him a hand at intervals and, presently, with the aid of the block-and-tackle and a lariat on one of the saddle-horses, the two sides of roughly dressed beef were slung up to a branch of the big cottonwood tree, well out of reach of the coyotes.

Catching up the rustler's patient horse, the Sergeant picked up the rifle and, after pumping out the shells, thrust it into its scabbard slung under the legadeiro of the saddle; then, knotting the lines around the horn, he proceeded to swiftly fashion a hackamore with his lariat.

"Reckon yu'll have to ride as yu' are, Shorty," he said. "I'm a-goin' to trail yu' alongside. What's up?" he added, as the other, with manacled hands on the saddle-horn, in the act of mounting, was staring at the buckskin with interest.

"Some hawss, that, yu're ridin', Sargint," he remarked, with a meaning, bitter smile.

"Some," assented Ellis dryly. "Well, yu' oughta know — bein' as 'twas yu' topped him off. *Umbagi!* — let's *trek*. Don't forget that hide, Barney!" he

94 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

shouted. "Hang onto that brand, too — mind Shorty don't swop it on yu'," he added with grim pleasantry.

The rancher, busily rolling up the bloody mass, with the rustler's knife and cleaver inside, responded with one of his customary barking laughs and, lashing it on behind his saddle, mounted; and with him bringing up the rear, the little cavalcade turned homewards.

In due time they arrived at the detachment, and the Sergeant, after carefully searching and locking up his prisoner, withdrew outside the building to discuss matters with Gallagher.

"Guess there ain't no Bull-Durham about th' tip old Bob Tucker's got this trip," he said with conviction. "Wonder who 'twas put that old stiff wise?"

He was more excited than was his wont, and his brow was contracted with impatient thought.

"Reckon he's tellin' th' straight tale?" Gallagher ventured dubiously, with a back-flung jerk of his head to the building.

"Shore," answered the policeman. "'Twas just a bit o' lucky gammon I threw into him — I'd no idea he'd fall for it like he did. Yu're a witness of his admissions of being an accomplice o' these fellers. As a matter o' fact," he continued, with a sly grin, "I haven't seen either o' *them* for well-nigh a month now. 'Twas Little Benny Parker wised me up 'bout what Shorty figured he was goin' to do for me. . . . He was down at th' post-office one mail day — quite a while ago, this is — an' these fellers was all outside together a-talkin' — Jules le Frambois along.

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 95

Benny's only a little nipper, an' bein' on th' other side o' his horse, cinchin' up, I guess they didn't notice him. Some cute kid, Benny!"

He remained silent for a space, in deep thought.

"Barney," he said presently, "I'd like yore help in this business. Scotty Robbins ain't o' much account. He's a poor cur, he is. But Big George's some bad man. I've got his record from over th' Line. He's done two fives an' a three-year term for horse-stealin', an' I know for a fact, too, that he's a gun artist. He killed two men in a dirty mix-up at Los Barancedes, over in New Mexico, quite a while back. Th' Rurales well-nigh put th' kibosh on him, but somehow he beat 'em out. So, yu' see," he concluded with a whimsical smile, "it ain't exactly a one-man job — at night, too. That is, if yu're willin'?"

His request was met more than half-way.

"Eyah! that I will, Sargint," the other answered bluntly and briefly. "I guess I know me duty as a law-abidin' man should." He had, in his brief acquaintance, formed a profound respect for the fearless man who sought his assistance.

"I know it's not exactly a civilian's end o' th' deal to get shoved into takin' unnecessary risks," Ellis went on. "If I had time I'd ride out to Buffalo Wallow an' get Nicholson — he's about due there, on patrol. But I haven't . . . an' this lay's supposed to come off tomorrow night. Besides, I wanta go an' see Tucker. Pity old Boswell, th' J.P.'s, gone East. I'd a got yu' sworn in as a 'special.' So yu' see how it is," he ended simply.

"Eyah!" said Gallagher, with a grim heartiness;

96 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

"don't yu' worry over nothin' son. My name's Barney Gallagher. I kin 'trail me coat' as good as me father or me grandfather ever did. Yu'll find I'm right there with th' goods."

Ellis regarded the speaker's hard-featured face with its twinkling Irish-blue eyes, and his angular, powerful frame.

"Yu' just bet yu' are, Barney," he murmured thoughtfully. "Yu' just bet yu' are." See here; look! I'll mosey on over to Tucker's first thing in th' mornin'; an' I'll find out, if I can — without tellin' him nothin' — what he knows. Shorty'll be safe enough locked up here while we're away, an' if we nail these other two we can take th' whole bunch into Sabbano for their preliminary trial. I'll be back mid-day, an' towards evenin' we'll slide out."

Their arrangements thus settled, Gallagher departed to his ranch, and Ellis proceeded to cook supper for himself and his prisoner. Later he fixed up the horses for the night and, on second thought, after examining Johnny's hoof with a satisfied scrutiny, and leading him around a little, he wrenched off the remaining shoes and turned him loose in the pasture, where there was good feed and running water.

"Go to it, old boy," he chuckled, amused at that animal's antics as, delighted with his unwonted freedom, the horse, after a roll or two, sailed off with a joyous kick and squeal, his previous limp now hardly perceptible.

Ellis watched him lovingly a minute or two then, lighting his pipe, he reentered the detachment.

CHAPTER VIII

*He was a dirty, aged man, who to his bottle clung,
And ever and anon did curse in some queer foreign tongue,
The tale he told was passing strange, yet pitiful, withal —
Of the lonely, care-fraught, troublous life
He lived from Fall to Fall.*

THE OLD NESTER

AN uneventful hour and a half's ride next morning brought Benton within sight of Tucker's homestead at Fish Creek. Leaving the main trail, he struck into an old cow-track, which short cut wound its way through the thick brush on the west side of the latter's pasture, emerging from which, into a clear open space, he found the gate that he sought.

What little feed there had been inside the few fenced-in acres was cropped as close as if sheep had been herded there, and a bunch of horses and a few gaunt cows wandered disconsolately hither and thither, roaming the fence round and groping through the wire strands at the nourishment that lay just beyond their reach. It was a pitiful sight and Ellis, with his love for animals, felt a spasm of anger pass through him as he noticed bad festering barbed-wire scratches on more than one of the poor hungry brutes.

"Th' cursed, scared old fool," he muttered savagely. "I reckon he's got reason to be, though, if that whisper o' Shorty's is straight goods."

98 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

He rode slowly across the parched, dusty ground and, fording the creek, passed through the gate at the opposite end. Circling around the stables and corrals, he dismounted outside the weather-beaten shack in which the old man passed his lonely life. Dropping the buckskin's lines, the Sergeant climbed up the broken steps and shoved his way in through the half-opened door.

With an oath he reeled back and his hand streaked like lightning to his hip. For a second or two he remained perfectly motionless then, a grim smile slowly relaxing his features, he dropped his hand and gazed silently at the strange scene that met his eyes.

He beheld an under-sized, grizzled-bearded old man about sixty who, with the vacuous smile of the partially intoxicated, was leveling a rifle at him with shaking hands. He was seated in an arm-chair, at a rough table, that was littered with dirty crockery and cooking utensils. An empty glass was in front of him.

"*Saku bona, N'kos*," greeted Ellis mockingly.

"*Saku bona, Umlúngu*," came the guttural response, while the wavering rifle barrel slowly descended and the shriveled, stringy old throat worked convulsively. "*Allemachtig* — but I thort you wos that *verdomde schelm* — 'Short an' Dirty' — come a-nosin' arahnd agin."

Born and bred in the East End of London, thirty years on the South African veldt and ten in Canada, had not depreciated Tucker's accent much, and his speech was a curious jargon of Afrikander, Cockney, and Western vernacular.

"H—ll" said the policeman irritably. "Is this th' way yu' greet yore friends these days? Been gettin' yore Dutch up, eh? — an' early, at that. What's th' matter with Shorty? *He's* all right! W'en was 'e arahnd?"

"Yestiddy mornin'," piped Tucker. "I tell yer I cawn't abide that feller. I dahn't like th' looks of 'im an' I ain't a-goin' to 'ave 'im come a-messin' abaht 'ere . . . 'e ain't up ter no good. *Whau!* — I'll *skiet die verdomde schepsel*," he finished with a screech, and raising the rifle again.

"Here! Yu' come across with that gun!" snapped the Sergeant. "Yu' make me nervous. Come on now, Bob — let's have it. D'yu' hear?"

Alternately threatening and cajoling, he at length obtained the weapon and, jerking open the lever, pumped the magazine empty of shells. These he gathered up and put in his pocket.

"Got any more?" he inquired, ledging the rifle on some pegs.

The old man glowered at him silently, and pointed with a shaking finger to a cupboard, where a minute search produced two more packets of cartridges, which speedily joined the others.

"A man that's *dronk* ain't got no business monkey'n' around with a gun," remarked the policeman judicially.

"You're a *leugenaar*," hiccuped Tucker indignantly. "I ain't *dronk*."

"No — yu' ain't," retorted the Sergeant ironically. "Yu've got th' makin's of a first-class jag, though. Th' smell of yore breath's mighty refreshin'. Yu' wanta do what's right when a man

wearin' th' King's uniform comes arahnd yore *laager*."

The implied appeal to his hospitality was not lost upon the other who, arising with difficulty, walked unsteadily over to a dirty sofa and, groping underneath, dragged forth a half-full Imperial quart bottle of "Burke's Irish."

"*Whau!* Got it cached, eh? I *korner*," chuckled Ellis, reaching for a glass and pouring himself out a generous libation. "*Allemachtig*, but I'm dry this mornin'. Wish this was good, cold tickey beer instead o' whiskey. *N'dipe manzi?*"

His elderly host, relaxing back into his arm-chair again, indicated a bucket and dipper. Benton mixed his drink and raised his glass.

"*Salue*," he muttered, and drank.

"*Drink hael*," the other responded gruffly.

Putting down his empty glass, the Sergeant seated himself and proceeded to roll a cigarette.

"See here; look," he began, licking the paper across. "Yu'll be gettin' *dronk* an' doin' some poor sucker a mischief with that gun if yu' ain't careful; an' then yu'll most likely land in *die tronk* on a murder charge, *Myjnheer* Bob Tucker.

"Say," he continued suspiciously, as a sudden thought struck him. "Yu' was over to th' detachment to see me th' day before yesterday, wasn't yu'?"

"*Ja*," answered the old man sulkily. "An' yer ain't never abaht w'en a feller wants yer."

Ignoring the testy reply, the policeman resumed: "When yu' left Barney Gallagher's which trail d'yu'

come home by? — th' long 'un, or th' short 'un through my pasture? "

"Th' short 'un," said Tucker wonderingly. "W'y? "

"Anythin' happen to yu' on th' trail? " inquired his interlocutor.

The old man hesitated a moment. "*Ja!* Did 'ave a bit of a shindig," he admitted shamefacedly.

"*Ja,*" said the Sergeant. "I thought so; an' now I'll tell yu' what happened. Yu' was *dronk* an' let yore lines catch under th' end o' th' *disselboom*, an' yore team up an' run away on yu'. Managed to pull 'em up, somehow, I suppose. Providence always seems to hand out a special dispensation to fellers that's full, else more'n likely it's th' hospital *yu'd* be in instead o' that chair."

"Well, I pulled *die schelms*, anyway," said the other. "An' I 'ad to go back abaht 'arf a mile fer a bag o' chicken feed as fell aht."

"*Ja!* . . . an' a bag o' blasted nails yu' had aboard fell aht wiv' it," mimicked Ellis, irritably. "An' my hawss picked one of 'em up in his nighfore an' he's been out o' business ever since."

The old man, fumbling with trembling fingers about his waistcoat, produced a short clay pipe and, filling it, proceeded to smoke.

"If yu' don't let up on th' *dop* for a space," resumed the policeman severely, "yu'll be havin' fancies again — bad 'uns, too."

The abandoned Tucker cocked a boiled eye at his would-be mentor.

"Tchkk!" he clucked testily. "Rats . . . an' sech like. I've 'ad 'em. . . . Yer cawn't skeer me

wiv yer *fancies*," he shrilled suddenly, with senile defiance. "'Ow abaht *you*? 'Tis an Aberdeen man's 'Say w'en!' yer poured aht fer yourself, I noticed — an' then yer turns rahnd an' torks ter me like a bloomin' *unfundusi*. *Whau!* I *korner fancies!*" he wound up bitterly.

The Sergeant swallowed the home-thrust with a tolerant grin.

"Ain't figurin' on practisin' what I preach just yet," he rejoined.

"I'm a pore old feller," whimpered Tucker, dropping his pipe and beginning to weep with maudlin self-pity. "Yer all tries to 'come it' over me."

The gray beard jerked up and down convulsively with his sobs.

"Aw, h—I! come, now," said Benton, not unkindly. "Yu' bring a lot o' yore troubles on yore-self. Why, don't yu' sell out here, Dad, an' go back East to yore son there, where yu'd be looked after properly? Yu're too old to be livin' here on yore lonesome like this."

The old man gazed drearily through the open door.

"I *wuz* dahn theer two years ago," he said huskily, and with a querulous, childish simplicity that moved his hearer more than that individual cared to show. "My 'Arry's a good lad, but that theer *vrouw* o' 'is kills my pig properly. Nah! — there ain't no peace theer. An' th' *kinders* cries, an' w'enever 'e tries ter stan' hup fer hissself she hups an' knocks 'im off th' perch reg'lar. She started on me, too," he went on, spitting vindictively. "But I pulled aht of it an' come back 'ere. I 'member

one night I went 'ome wiv a bottle ter 'ave a smile wiv me b'y. Th' kitchen door were shut, an' I c'ud 'ear 'em a-goin' to it fer fair. All of a sudden there come such a smack, that I guess she were a-tryin' ter prove whether 'is block or 'er mop-stick were th' 'ardest. I weren't a-goin' buttin' in where dry pokes an' 'ard words wuz a-goin', so I *trekked* aht of it quick — dahn ter th' pub on th' corner o' Iroquois Street, an' got *dronk* peaceful on me own. Nah," he concluded, spitting again contemptuously, "folks is best single."

The Sergeant looked hard at the careworn, dissipated old face, doubting — and not for the first time, either — whether, under that simple exterior, there lay not a better philosophy than he himself could boast of.

"Aye," he agreed slowly. "Like as not yu're right, Dad — like as not. Now, what was it yu' come to see me about?"

The old man fidgeted in his chair uneasily.

You mind me a-tellin' yer once abaht that theer old nitchie 'Roll-in-th'-Mud,' as I fahnd larst year in th' bush, wiv 'is leg broke, an' took back ter th' Agency ag'in?"

The policeman nodded. He had heard the oft-repeated tale more times than he could remember.

"Well," continued his host. "Th' old feller comes arahnd ter see me now an' ag'in — just ter say 'Howdy' an' cadge a bit o' baccar. Well, th' mornin' I come over ter see you I wuz ahtside th' stable *inspannin'* me team, meanin' fer ter *trek* over ter Barney Gallagher's fer some chicken feed an' stuff, w'en 'e comes a-jiggin' by, a-*sjambokin'* 'is old

cayuse like them nitchies ullus does. 'E pulls hup w'en 'e sees me, an' grins. 'Howdy,' says I. 'Howdy,' says 'e. I dahn't savvy 'is *indaba*, so we ullus mykes sign tork. 'E seemed kind o' excited like an' 'e catches me by th' coat an' leads me rahnd th' back o' th' stable, where we cud see th' 'orses in th' field. 'E starts in ter wive 'is arms like as if 'e wuz a-tryin' ter imityte a bloke a-drivin' 'em aw'y to'rds th' West, then 'e touches 'is chest an' grunts '*Naymoyer, naymoyer*,' two or three times, an' shykes 'is 'ead. I catches on ter wot 'e meant, quick . . . cudn't 'elp it. 'E wuz a-meanin' that some bloke wuz a-goin' ter try an' run 'em off from me, an' wanted 'im ter 'elp 'im an' 'e wudn't. That's wot 'e meant," wound up Tucker breathlessly, turning an imploring, frightened face to the Sergeant. "An' I figger that theer bloke wuz that same *schelm*, Short an' Dirty."

For reasons of his own, the policeman tried to allay the old man's shrewd suspicions.

"Now, don't yu' go for to get a-blamin' poor Shorty for everythin'. He ain't figurin' to do yu' no harm. P'r'aps th' nitchie was only meanin' yore stock wanted turnin' out of that god-forsaken pasture o' yores, onto th' range again, where they can rustle a bite. It's a blasted shame, yore coopin' 'em up like that. That's what old 'Roll-in-th'-Mud' meant."

Thus he chided, but Tucker only shook his gray head obstinately, and clung firmly to his pet conviction.

"Had any more visitors th' last two or three days besides Shorty?" queried Benton.

The old man struggled with his liquor-fumed wits awhile, torturing his memory.

"Let's see," he said slowly. "W'y, yes! . . . That theer young feller — Scotty Robbins, I think's 'is nyme — wot works fer th' Wharnock outfit . . . 'e come arahnd abaht fower d'ys ago. 'E's come 'ere ter see me lots o' times. 'E said once as 'ow 'e wished 'e 'ad th' money ter buy me plice. 'E seems a nice, kind-'earted young feller — that. Sometimes 'e brings another feller wot works wiv 'im along too. 'E's a big chap — 'is nyme's Fisk."

"Yes," said Ellis meditatively. "I know 'em. They're both nice, kind-'earted fellers, as yu' say."

He looked at his watch and jumped to his feet. "Well, I reckon I'll be pullin' back," he said. "I'll go on over to th' Reserve sometime soon, and see old Roll-in-th'-Mud, an' have a palaver with him through an interpreter."

The old man arose shakily and, with a string of Dutch and Zulu maledictions on his supposed enemies, put a trembling, withered hand on the policeman's sleeve.

"Yer won't let any o' th' *schelms* put anyfink over on me, will yer, son?" he said wistfully.

Benton turned and looked at him kindly, and a wave of compassionate pity for the helpless old reprobate who besought his protection, not unmixed with anger at the men who aimed to despoil him, stirred his deep, sympathetic nature strangely.

"Now, don't yu' worrit none. I'll look after yu', Dad," he said gently. "Only yu' wanta take a tumble an' turn that stock o' yores out tomorrow . . . they're starvin'. An' don't yu' go a-gettin'

full an' monkey'n' around with that gun no more, else I won't," he added warningly. "I'm a-goin' to keep them shells for a time, to insure yore good behavior."

Tucker, overwhelming him with abject promises of immediate and lasting reform, tottered out into the open after him.

"W'en I see that theer buckskin 'orse o' Barney Gallagher's thru' th' winder, I made shore as it wuz Short an' Dirty comin' arahnd ag'in," he piped. "W'y, 'e used ter ride'im."

"*Ja*," answered Ellis enigmatically, as he swung into the saddle. "*Used*. Well, so long, Dad. Mind what I told yu', now. I'll be around to see yu' again soon."

CHAPTER IX

*"Saint Pether . . . who hold'st th' Keyes av Hivin —
Oi'm poor . . . an' Oi'm old . . . comin' sixty-sixin —
Thru' booze . . . ? Eyah! — partly . . . but honest, Oi've bin —
Saint Pether . . . Och! — won't ye — plaze — let me — come in?"*

THE DERELICT

WITH a feeling of exultation he loped swiftly away. His morning had not been wasted, he reflected. "All over but th' shoutin'," he muttered.

"Wish I'd got time to go an' see that nitchie, though. Can't make th' Agency today, now. Well, let's see how this comes off. I can get that old beggar any old time."

Then, suddenly, an uneasy thought crossed his mind. What if they didn't show up. If they were hanging around somewhere close at hand, and had seen him coming and going from Tucker's. His alert eyes flickered around the rolling stretch of prairie unceasingly, but nothing more disturbing than a few scattered bunches of horses and cattle appeared to his vision. Presently, topping the summit of a small rise on the familiar trail, he came within sight of the detachment again.

Suddenly he pulled up sharply.

"Why, hello!" he ejaculated. "What th' devil's up now?"

For, in the distance, he saw a team and wagon

outside the dwelling, with two figures scuffling at the horses' heads, and the wind brought to his ears the sounds of a violent altercation. Jabbing the spurs into the buckskin, he raced towards them, and his speed soon brought him up to the combatants, who were just picking themselves up from a clinch on the ground. In one of them he immediately recognized a rancher in the district named Pryce — commonly known as "Ginger" Pryce, from the somewhat sanguine color of his hair and corresponding temperament. The other, a tall, stooping, shrunken-faced old man, was a stranger to him. The latter's face was bleeding, and he was gasping for breath from his encounter with his younger antagonist with long, wheezy, asthmatical sobs that shook his emaciated body terribly.

"Here, now! What in h—l's this racket about?" shouted the Sergeant, dismounting.

Spitting, and breathing heavily, Pryce burst out: "Them hawsses an' wagon is mine!" He choked with his rage, and paused to regain his wind. "Yu' 'member I come around to yu' when they was stole 'bout three weeks ago?" he ran on excitedly. "I was comin' along th' trail 'bout a mile nor'west o' here when I meets this old stiff comin' sailin' along with *my* team an' wagon, as bold as yu' like. He says he bought 'em, an' he's showed me a bill o' sale that he says he got off'n th' feller he bought 'em from . . . but I'll gamble it's only a faked-up one, an' *he's* th' feller what stole 'em. I made him drive on here to yore place. Yu' wasn't in, so we gets arguin', an' he calls me a 'red-headed rooster.' I won't take that off'n any man — old or young."

"Why didn't yu' put th' boots to him while yu' was at it?" said Ellis, with sneering sarcasm. "He's only an old man an' I guess yu' could easy do it."

"Well, old gentleman," he continued. "What about this outfit? Where'd yu' get 'em?"

Pale and exhausted, the aged man strove to recover from his distress. His agitation was pitiable, and the Sergeant gave him time and waited quietly.

Speech suddenly broke from him, in a torrent of expostulation.

"I didn't steal 'em!" he shrilled, in a thin, high, cracked falsetto. "I didn't! — I bought 'em honest . . . an' I've got th' bill o' sale to prove it. I'm an honest man . . . always have bin . . . an' —an' this feller here's abused me an' beat me up . . . an' he's twenty years younger'n me, if he's a day. O-oh, o-oh, oh, my God!" And the tears ran down his lined old face into his gray beard.

"Yu' did steal 'em, you old liar — yu' know yu' did!" Pryce commenced to yell back at him.

"Aw, quit yore squallin', Pryce," snarled the policeman angrily, "or I'll damned soon give yu' somethin' to squall about. This ain't a dog fight. *I'm* runnin' this inquiry, an' I'll have it conducted in a proper manner. Just yu' keep yore traps closed — both of yu' — an' only open 'em to answer my questions. D'yu' hear?"

This roughly administered tonic had its effect, and the agitators grew perceptibly quieter. The Sergeant watched them narrowly.

"Now, let's start in again," he said. "Yu', Pryce! Yore team, wagon an' harness disappeared

on th'— th'— wait a bit, I've got it in my notebook — 'on th' sixth o' June. Team o' dark bays, branded E four on th' right shoulder. One with white star on forehead an' two white hind-fetlocks, an' t'other, white strip on forehead, an' a small kidney-sore on left side o' back. Heavy, double-stitched harness, with brass-mounted hames. Wagon — Studebaker — almost new.' ”

He leisurely examined the brands on the team and nodded as if satisfied.

“That's yore team all right,” he said. “Now, let's have a look at th' wagon. ‘Studebakers’ is common enough. Is there any marks, or somethin' yu' can positively swear to, about it — harness, th' same? ”

The other, nodding sulkily, indicated various features of identification.

With a final scrutiny, Ellis turned to the old man who, by this time, had recovered sufficiently to give fairly coherent answers.

“Let's have a look at yore bill o' sale, Dad,” he said.

The other, fumbling with shaking old hands about his pockets, at length produced a dirty folded paper. Benton opened it and proceeded to scan it closely, with a running commentary.

“‘Sold to Hiram Bryan. One bay team. Branded E four on right shoulder.’ H'm, h'm. ‘Thirteenth of June.’ Unlucky day for yu', Dad. ‘One horse, two white ’— h'm, h'm, descriptions correspond O. K. ‘Two hundred an' fifty.’ Got th' outfit cheap enough . . . but I don't know . . .

nigh horse is all right, but th' off'n ain't worth a d—n with them bog-spavins. Seems to be made out in order, all right. Hello! Whose signature's this? 'Gordon Brown'!" He looked up suddenly. "Now, perhaps you'll tell me who, an' what like of a feller this 'Mister Gordon Brown' is?"

The old man gazed at his interlocutor out of watering, rheumy eyes.

"Why, he's a big feller, with a black beard," he piped unhesitatingly. And slowly and haltingly, with heavy, asthmatical breathing, he began his labored explanation.

"I'd just come over th' Line, from Nebrasky. Things was bad down ther', an' I figgered on filin' on a bit of a homestead somewheres around this part o' th' country. I was in th' hotel at Sabbano when I first met this feller—him an' his partner, a younger chap—an' we got a-talkin' together. He said as how they'd had a homestead down this ways, but had got burnt out . . . so they was—or *he* was—goin' ter take up 'nother place, somewheres up in th' bush, west o' here . . . later. I told him as I had a bit o' money an' was a-figgerin' on buyin' a wagon an' team . . . an' he says: 'Why, we'll sell yu' our'n . . . we ain't got no use fer 'em jest now, an' afterwards I kin offer yu' a job—freightin' some stuff o' ours up to our new place.' He said as how him an' his partner were a-workin' fer an outfit called th' Wharnock Cattle Company." (Ellis started involuntarily.) "They was a freightin' some supplies back ter th' outfit with a four-horse team, an' he says ter me: 'Yu' kin come back with us, ef

yu' like, an' see th' team an' wagon . . . an' ef yu' buy 'em, I guess I kin get yu' a job teamin' fer th' company till we're ready ter pull out ter our own place.' They'd got a big load on, so it was a two-days' trip, an' th' night we gets ther', he says: 'We've got 'em bein' kept over at a friend o' our'n. Me partner here'll go get 'em in th' mornin'.' Well, th' young feller brings 'em in th' next afternoon an', as they looked as th' kind I wanted, an' th' price bein' all right why, I buys 'em, an' he gives me this bill o' sale."

"D'yu' pay him cash?" inquired Ellis.

The old man nodded wearily. "Two hunnerd an' fifty dollars," he murmured. "I on'y had a hundred left, but they got me inter a poker game at th' outfit, an' they skinned me o' that. Th' big feller, he fixed it up with th' foreman fer me ter work ther' with me team fer a week or two. Th' day before yestiddy he comes ter me an' he says: 'Termorrer mornin' yu' get yore team an' pull out fer Cherry Creek. We're ready ter quit now, an' there's some stuff down ther' as we wants yu' ter freight up ter our place in th' bush.' He tells me th' way, an' he says: 'Yu' hit th' trail that goes south, past a feller called Barney Gallagher's. Don't yu' *stop* ther', though. Ther'll be a feller with red hair, on a white hawss, meet yu' somewheres around ther', and' he'll show yu' wher' ther' stuff is, an' help yu' ter get it loaded.' Well, I pulls out, an' comes over here, an' fust thing I know is, I meets up with this feller" (here he indicated Pryce), "an' he holds me up, an' says as how th' team an' wagon's his'n," he wound up, with a hopeless inflection in his tones.

There followed a long silence. The policeman remained in deep thought awhile.

"See here; look," he said. "Yu' tell me as near as yu' can, what this big feller's like."

The old man looked at him absently a moment.

"Eh?" he said. "Why, he's a big feller with a black beard. They calls him 'George' around th' outfit. Th' young feller . . . they calls *him* 'Scotty.' I dunno what his other name is. All my dealin's has bin mostly with th' big feller — 'George.' He does all th' talkin' . . . an' th' young chap . . . seems ter do as he tells him."

The Sergeant nodded gravely. "That settles it," he said sharply.

Pryce, who, all this time, had been an eager listener, now sputtered excitedly: "Why, why — that's George Fisk an' Scotty Robbins he's a-meanin'. Must be. H—l! *They're* all right. I know 'em both well. It ain't likely as *they'd* come a-sneakin' 'round a feller's place while he was away an' steal his outfit. I'm a-goin' ter ride over ter th' Whar-nock outfit right now an' see'f this old gink's a-tellin' th' truth," he ended, with a spiteful glance at the old man.

Ellis turned and regarded him with his peculiar, blank, aggressive stare.

"Well, I guess yu' *ain't*," he drawled coldly. "That's *my* end o' this business. I know more about them same two fellers'n what yu' do. I know this much, too. From information I've received, yu' wouldn't find 'em *at* th' outfit just now, anyways."

The other stared at him sullenly.

"That ther' team an' wagon's mine, no matter

whether them fellers is at home or abroad," he began blusteringly. "An' I guess I'll take 'em back with me."

"Reckon yu've got another guess comin', then," rejoined the policeman dryly. "Th' outfit may be your'n, all right, but yu' don't get 'em till this business is all cleared up, an' th' Court orders 'em to be returned to yu'. When I'm ready, I'll notify yu' to come into Sabbano — with yore witnesses, yu' understand — to prove yore ownership. D'yu' get me now?" he rapped out harshly, with a rising inflection in his tones.

The red-headed rancher regarded him with a sulky, brooding stare, the premeditated retort dying on his lips. For there was *that* in the Sergeant's face and voice, just then, that forbade any talking back; so, with a last, lingering, dissatisfied look at his newly found property, he slowly mounted his waiting horse and rode away.

Benton noted the course he took with grim satisfaction. No fear of his meeting *them* now. He was going home, all right — his place *lay* nor' east, he reflected. *They* would come in from the sou'west. He turned to the old man, whom the bill of sale had named as Bryan.

"Unhitch that team an' put 'em in th' stable, Bryan," he said. "An' take th' harness off 'em. I'm a-goin' to hold yu' on a charge of vagrancy till this mix-up's all squared out."

Slowly the other complied with the Sergeant's order and, leading the horses into the stable, endeavored to unharness them; but the weight of the heavy, brass-mounted hames seemed too much for

his strength to raise and hang on the stable-pegs. He staggered and almost fell, the Sergeant coming to his assistance, and giving him a hand.

"An' *yu'* figured on takin' up a homestead, Dad?" he said incredulously. "Why, with yore age, an th' shape *yu're* in, it'd kill *yu'*. *Yu'* ain't fit for nothin' like *that*. Whatever d'*yu'* come over here for? Ain't *yu'* no friends — relations, or family, back where *yu'* come from — to look after *yu'*?"

The old man shook his gray head despondently and, with a weary sigh and long-drawn whistling breaths, sank down on an oat bin.

"I did hev one time," he wheezed, in the cracked, querulous tones of the aged. "Plenty o' money, too! Oh, I hed lots o' friends — then. I raised four of a family — three boys an' a girl. They're all married, an' livin' in different parts o' th' States. They don't bother none over th' ol' man — now. Th' wife — she was th' last one as I hed in th' world ter call friend. She died last Christmas, so I come over here. Son," he said, with an impressive solemnity, pausing a moment, "whin *yu'* see a man o' my years down an' out, what d'*yu'* gen'rally figger's wrong?"

Eilis, with an inscrutable face, was thoughtfully studying the venerable, weary countenance of his elderly vis-a-vis.

"Booze?" he queried slowly.

"I reckon *yu'* hev it," was the hopeless reply. "Me own worst friend! But — I hev always bin honest."

The policeman considered the other's face a moment or two longer, then suddenly made up his mind.

"I'll take a chance on it," he muttered; then, raising his voice: "See here; look, Bryan," he said. "Sizin' things up as they've panned out up to date, I believe yu've been tellin' me th' straight tale, all right. Now, I've got another feller in here — locked up. There's only one cell. But I'm not a-goin' to shut yu' in with a dirty criminal like him, if yu'll give me yore word as th' honest man yu' call yoreself, yu' won't try to skip out on me. I'll be away tonight — or th' best part o' th' night — on duty. So yu' an' this feller'll be alone in here. Yu're not to talk to him, mind. Yu' can give him a cup o' water thru' th' bars if he wants it, but no matches or anythin' to smoke. I'm takin' no chances on a fire while I'm away. Yu' can just lay around an' sleep on my cot, an' let that feller think as yu're a-watchin' him. 'Member," he added warningly, "if yu' *did* try to skip, I could easy catch yu' ag'in . . . an' it'd be a sure sign yu' was a guilty accomplice o' these fellers. I need yu' as an all-important witness, an' this is th' only chance yu've got of gettin' clear. D'yu' get me now?"

The old man, seeming grateful at the trust thus reposed in him, eagerly gave the required promise.

"Son," he said solemnly, "I give yu' my word. Yu're treatin' me like a white man."

CHAPTER X

*Now, gallant Saxon, hold thine own!
No maiden's hand is round thee thrown!
That desperate grasp thy frame might feel,
Through bars of brass and triple steel! —
They tug, they strain! down, down they go,
The Gael above, Fitz-James below.*

SCOTT

S EVEN o'clock came, and the Sergeant, with a few parting instructions to old Hiram Bryan, saddled up and departed for Gallagher's.

The latter who, pipe in mouth, was seated on the steps of his shack busily splicing a hondu in a raw-hide lariat, or riata, looked up at the other's approach, and glanced curiously at the Sergeant's unfamiliar dress and mount.

"Hello," he said waggishly. "Fancy-dress ball, eh? What's th' idea?"

For Benton was riding the prisoner's white horse and also wearing that gentleman's chaps, coat, hat, and white handkerchief.

Ellis grinned. "They're expaictin' Shorty," he said. "Mustn't disappoint 'em."

Half an hour later the two men rode slowly along the trail leading to Fish Creek. The evening shadows began to close in, but they dawdled, keeping a wary look-out and talking in low, guarded tones, for voices carry far over the range on still nights.

"Sergeant," said Gallagher casually, during their progress. "'Member, it ain't that I'm grudgin' givin' yu' this bit o' help but, d'yu' know, I've often thort it kinder queer-like as yu' don't get 'em to give yu' another man to help yu' out here?"

Ellis did not reply immediately. "I could," he said presently. "But what'd be th' use? They'd most likely send me along some gentlemanly young 'Percy,' just fresh up from Regina, who didn't know his mouth from a hole in th' ground. It ain't no child's play — handlin' th' crooked stock cases in a district like this. A man's got to be onto his job right from th' drop o' th' hat. Look how they put it over Williamson — what! He should never have come here. He should have stayed with that staff job in th' Q.M.'s store . . . never did nothin' else since he's bin in th' Force. They saddled me with a peach once, I mind — when I was stationed at Goddard. He was a nice, well-meanin' kid, all right, but all th' same he queered two o' th' best cases I've ever had," he ended bitterly.

They rode side by side in silence awhile.

"Yu' heeled?" inquired the Sergeant quietly. And, as the other nodded, and tapped his hip significantly: "Mind, though, I ain't anxious to have any shootin' on this business, unless it's absolutely necessary. I don't want no cursed chasin' in th' dark, either, with th' chances o' th' hawsses comin' down wallop, in every doggoned badger-hole around. I ain't just figured *how* I'm a-goin' to get 'em yet! Can't tell, this stage o' th' game. It'll most likely have to be somethin' almighty sudden, yu' can take yore oath o' that!"

Arriving later at the previously mentioned line of brush that fringed the west side of Tucker's pasture, they struck in along the old cow trail and dismounting about thirty yards from the gate, still within the shelter of the dense bush, they squatted down and awaited events.

A three-quarter moon showed itself rarely through a thick rift of clouds and, as their eyes became accustomed to the curious gray light that flooded everything around, objects within a certain radius stood out with surprising clearness.

"Lord!" said the policeman in a low undertone, "I wish we could smoke. 'Twon't do to chance strikin' a match, though. Reckon they'll foller th' fence-line from th' sou'west angle when they *do* come. Good job Tucker ain't got no dogs to start in yappin'. Guess *he's* drunk an' sleepin' by now. Good job, too, he don't know no more'n he does. He'd be a-runnin' around all worked up like a flea in a mitt, with that old Mauser o' his, an' shootin' at th' moon."

"We'll have ter look out for them hawsses o' our'n a-whinnyin', too," said Gallagher anxiously. "That's what I'm scared of."

A slow, dreary hour passed. Ellis arose stiffly, and stretched himself.

"I'm gettin' tired o' settin' here," he whispered to the other. "I'm a-goin' out to th' edge o' th' brush. If either o' them hawsses starts in, yu' cut th' wind off'n him quick." And he stole away noiselessly.

He was barely away ten minutes before he came gliding back.

"Here comes somebody," he whispered. "Along from th' sou'west angle, as I figured, too. Guess it's them, all right. If 'tis, I reckon I'll have to jump somethin' hot off'n th' brain 'bout gettin' 'em."

With all their faculties on the stretch, they held their breaths and listened intently. Soon their eager ears caught the sound of approaching horses and the faint creak of leather. Straining their eyes in the gloom, they presently made out the forms of two riders slowly and cautiously traversing the cleared strip that lay between the fence and the line of brush.

Reaching the gate they halted, but making no attempt, as yet, to dismount or open it, remained lolling on their horses and talking in low tones.

"Waitin' for Shorty," whispered Ellis to Gallagher who, smothering a chuckle, whispered back: "Some wait!"

Even in that dim light they could see that one of the riders loomed up a big, bulky shape, in contrast to his slighter-appearing companion.

"That's Big George, all right," murmured the rancher into Benton's ear as a low, deep bass undertone rumbled to them. "Listen ter that voice o' his!"

Ready for emergencies, they quietly watched the two dark forms and patiently waited. Their vigil was short. An unmistakable, smothered oath came to their ears. The guarded, booming growl of the bigger man, became more insistent. They saw the slighter shape dismount and, presently the "tang" of a tightly stretched barbed-wire being released and

drawn aside sounded sharply in the stillness. The big shape, still mounted, slowly disappeared into the shadows beyond, the smaller one resuming his seat in the saddle and waiting at the opening.

Feverishly the Sergeant weighed the situation. "Scotty" Robbins — and, without a doubt, it must be he — possessed an extraordinarily fast horse, he reflected. Even if he *was* able, under the guise of Shorty, to range near enough to close, it was not particularly easy to pull a good rider like Scotty out of the saddle. He would be sure to raise a loud outcry at the first attempt, and thus warn Fisk. If he once got away, it would be futile to follow him in the dark.

The emergency caused a wild thought to flash into Benton's fertile brain. Why not *rope* him? Long years of constant practise had rendered him clever with a lariat. It was worth trying. The tumble would insure Scotty's partial silence anyway, and Gallagher could fix the rest, leaving him free to tackle Big George, whom he knew it would be suicidal to ever call on to surrender at close range.

Clutching his companion, he whispered tensely: "Now they're split! I'll have to nail Mister Scotty quick, before he gets a chance to make a breakaway. That roan o' his — 'Duster' — can run anythin' around here off'n its laigs. I'm a-goin' to try *ropin'* him. Let's have that rawhide riata o' yores — that 'black-jack' o' mine kinks. Get yore handkerchief ready, an' run out an' cram it into his kisser an' choke th' — if he starts in to holler. Here, Barney!" — he slipped the latter a pair of handcuffs — "hold these. Keep 'em open an' give

'em to me when I say. Now look out! Gaffe him quick when I jerk him off'n th' perch."

Leading Shorty's horse slowly and heedfully back through the brush, the way they had come, he mounted and, after carefully shaking out a loop to his liking in the riata, which he trailed in readiness with back-flung hand, he circled around until he reached the clear space between the fence and the brush.

Suddenly his borrowed mount nickered. Scotty Robbins started nervously at the sound, but a sigh of relief escaped him as the shape of the familiar white horse became revealed to his vision.

"Oh, Shorty — that yu'?" he called out, in a loud, tense undertone.

There was no answer from the rider, who approached near — *nearer*.

Suddenly, "Swis-s-s-s," came the sibilant hiss of something through the air, and the loop of a riata flopped fairly over his head and shoulders. Taken utterly by surprise, he uttered a frightened squawk and, with a quick upward thrust of his arm, endeavored to free himself of the encumbrance. The movement was too late. That single squawk was his limit. For the other, wheeling his horse on the instant, rammed in the spurs, and the next moment there came a terrible jerk that tore his clutching hands from the saddle-horn and flung him to the ground with all the breath knocked out of his body.

The startled, riderless horse gave a violent jump at the unexpected occurrence and tried to run, but the trailing lines under its feet causing its head to be yanked down severely at every step, from

customary experience it soon pulled up, snorting nervously.

With as much compunction as a cow-puncher who drags a calf up to the branding fire, so Ellis swiftly trailed the unfortunate Scotty towards the opening in the brush. The watchful Gallagher darted noiselessly forward and, turning him on his back, slacked off the lariat.

Benton leaped down. "Quick!" he whispered fiercely. "Let's have 'em!"

Snatching the handcuffs from the other, he snipped them on Scotty's wrists. The latter was still moaning and gasping with the shock of his fall.

"Yu' ain't croaked him, hev yu', Sargint?" said the rancher, in a low voice.

"Nah," snarled the policeman, in a tense whisper. "That flop's jerked th' wind outa him, that's all. He'll come to in a second an' most likely start in to bawl, so yu'll wanta be ready with that handkerchief. Say! that's sure some rope-horse o' Shorty's — c'n turn on a dollar. See here; look! I'm a-goin' to wait at th' gate for George. No use for to try an' rope *him* — he's too heavy. I'll have to fix him some 'other road. He'll be some handful, too, believe me! If I shout for yu', leave Scotty an' come on th' dead run. Mind, though, I don't want no shootin' unless it's absolutely necessary."

He turned swiftly, and was about to mount again, when a sudden thought flashed into his mind. Scotty was not wearing white chaps. They would be a "dead give away," he reflected. At close range they would show up plainly to Fisk in that light.

The next instant he had unbuckled the waist-strap

124 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

and kicked them off; then, leaving Shorty's white horse, he ran to where his late victim's mount still stood waiting. At his sudden, hasty approach, it edged away slightly, and snorted, scenting an unfamiliar being; but, impatient, he grabbed at and caught one of its trailing lines, and the next minute was in the saddle. The stirrups were about an equal length to his own, so he felt comfortable enough on the beautiful, springy beast. Taking up its owner's previous position at the open gate, he waited quietly.

Soon there came a slowly gathering, muffled thud of many hoofs, and the shadowy blurr of a bunch of horses became visible to him as they drew near. On they came, and the leader, after suddenly stopping and snorting with puffed-out nostrils at the apparition of the rider, who remained so motionless at the side of the gate, darted through, the others speedily following, well strung out by the skilful tactics of their driver to avoid jamming at the opening.

As the last horse passed through the gate, Ellis planted himself squarely in the midway, facing the rider, who was bringing up the rear. The huge form gradually loomed up nearer to him in the surrounding gloom.

"H—I! what yu' waitin' fur, d—n yu'?" rumbled the deep, harsh, low-pitched voice. "Why didn't yu' head 'em off, west?"

Benton moved forward slowly with raised hand.

"Sh-sh!" he hissed warningly.

Fisk halted irresolutely. Scotty's horse fooled him completely.

"What's up?" he growled.

Ellis, his powerful right arm swinging free, ranged up alongside as if to have speech with the other. Then suddenly, and with an uncanny swiftness, he silently and viciously struck for the angle of the big man's jaw.

The blow crashed home, and the great body went lurching sideways out of the saddle. Like a flash the Sergeant swung down off his horse and jumped for the rustler, dragging out another pair of handcuffs as he did so.

His haste was his undoing, for he got wedged in between the frightened, jostling horses and knocked sprawling. The next instant a huge, bear-like shape that made horrible, beast-like noises in its throat, fell upon him and clutched his arms. Frenziedly he writhed under that terrible grip.

"Barney!" he yelled. "Oh, Bar —!"

But his cry changed to a gurgle as the other's hold shifted to his throat. With desperate efforts he fought off the choking clasp and, wriggling somehow from under his enemy's smothering weight, scrambled with reeling brain to his feet.

Big George had arisen also, snorting and grinding his teeth with mad, demoniacal passion, and Ellis instinctively guessed that he was fumbling for his gun. Entirely forgetful of his own weapon in the Berserker rage that possessed him, the Sergeant sprang at the giant rustler, hitting out with great smashing punches to the jaw and stomach, that sent Fisk staggering back and gave him no opportunity to draw. With a snarl like a wild beast, he closed again with his slighter antagonist and, as the two

126 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

men swayed hither and thither, Benton became dimly conscious of Gallagher's form and voice added to the mêlée.

Stumbling and tripping, the struggling, cursing trio came headlong to the ground. Suddenly, with a gurgling yell of pain, Fisk released his grip on Ellis, who was the under dog and, clutching at his own throat, fell backwards; his head, meanwhile, giving curious, spasmodic jerks. Uncomprehending, but quick to follow up his advantage, the Sergeant rolled over upon him; and as he did so, his hands, seeking the other's neck, encountered a rope, and he instantly realized what had happened.

"Steady, Barney!" he panted. "Ease up a bit. Yu'll choke him."

Roughly, and with the swift celerity of men accustomed to throwing and hog-tying steers, they trussed up their late formidable antagonist, winding the forty-foot riata around him as he kicked and raved, with a maze of knots that left him as helpless as a child. Then, utterly spent with their exertions, they lay back, gasping for air and sweating.

Gradually recovering, they regained their speech somewhat.

"G—d!" said Ellis, still breathing heavily, "that's about the worst man-handling I guess I ever *did* get! Here! This won't do, lyin' on our backs all night. Where in h—l's them bracelets? I dropped 'em somewheres around here." And, arising unsteadily, he began to kick amongst the short grass.

With the aid of some matches the missing articles were eventually found. The two men then turned

to the huge, bound figure of the rustler, who was still cursing and twisting under his bonds. Cautiously, loosening one great arm at a time, they clasped the steel loops around the enormous wrists.

"Should have a gun," muttered the Sergeant. "He was a-tryin' to draw, all right. Can't get at it, though, while he's on his back. Here, let's roll him over on his face, Barney, so's I can get at his hip-pocket."

In about as gentle a fashion as a lumber-jack twisting a log with a cant-hook, so the big body was heaved over into the desired position, and Ellis commenced his investigations. A smothered exclamation escaped him.

"Hullo!" he said, "what's this? So *that's* why I didn't get mine, eh?"

He struck a match, disclosing by its light the butt of a long-barreled Colt's .45 protruding from the rustler's right hip-pocket. Being unscabbarded the wing of the hammer had (providentially, for Benton) caught in the torn lining of the pocket and become firmly fixed therein.

"Eyah!" ejaculated Gallagher. "D'yu' ever see th' likes o' that, now? Talk about luck — what!"

Ellis carelessly spilled the shells into his hand. "How's Scotty?" he inquired.

"Oh, him? — he's all right," answered the rancher. "He come around while yu' was a-waitin' at th' gate fur Big George, here. He started in to snivel, but I d—d soon shoved th' handkerchief in his trap."

"Mighty good job yu' fixed George as yu' did," said the Sergeant. "I didn't wanta shoot, but I

guess I'd a-had to if yu' hadn't come along just then. I ain't heavy enough to rough-an'-tumble it with a bull like him. He well-nigh got me that first trip. Thank yu', Barney. Yu're right there with th' goods, an' no mistake. . . . I'll never forget it."

"Aw, h—l," said the other roughly, to hide his feeling. "'Twarn't nothin', Sargint. I on'y picked up th' first thing as come handy—that riata yu'd chucked off'n Scotty. That's all right."

A string of oaths from the recumbent Fisk aroused them.

"Hey!" rumbled the growling, bass voice threateningly. "Who is yu' fellers, anyways? What'n h—I d'yu' think yu're at? Yu'! . . .

"One o' yu's Barney Gallagher—I know that. I'll fix yu' fur this, Barney!"

Ellis unwound the lariat from around the big man's legs; then, striking another match, held it to his own face.

"Know *me*, now?" he said. "George—I reckon I've got yu'! Get up, yu' big stiff, or I'll fix yu'!"

A fresh burst of blasphemy greeting his request, he picked up the riata again and, dropping a loop over the rustler's head and shoulders, drew it taut.

"Yu' go get me one o' them hawsses, Barney," he said quietly.

Gallagher sauntered over to where the two animals had halted after their first scare and were placidly feeding, and returned with Scotty's horse. The Sergeant mounted and took a turn of the riata around the saddle-horn.

Amidst an ominous silence he swung around in

his seat with shortened leg. "Comin'?" he inquired significantly.

Big George was no coward, but he was between the devil and the deep sea; for in the cold cruelty of the policeman's tones he read aright the signs of a pitiless purpose if he still persisted in further obstinacy. Sullenly he rolled over onto his knees, and awkwardly raised himself on his feet.

"So," said Ellis approvingly; "that's better."

Dismounting leisurely, he drew off the loop and coiled up the riata.

"Get yu' over to that openin' in th' brush, where yore partner is," he continued, in an authoritative, menacing voice. "Here! — this way." And, grasping the big man's shoulder, he guided him over to the indicated spot.

There they found the handcuffed, miserable Scotty. He had made no attempt to run away. Naturally a timid rogue, the rough handling that he had received had knocked whatever little pluck he possessed out of him completely. Now he whined like a frightened child, blaming Fisk for their mutual mischance; but the latter cursed savagely back, threatening him in horrid terms, so he ceased his lamentations in pure dread of the other's dominant personality, and relapsed into shivering silence. Fisk began to raise his voice again.

"What d'yu' figure on chargin' us with, anyways?" he snarled. "Why, yu' ain't got nothin' on us! We was on'y lookin' fur one o' our own hawsses, as we thort might —"

"George," said the Sergeant appealingly, with up-raised, protesting hand, "don't! Yu' gimme a

pain — honest, yu' do. I'll tell yu' what I'm chargin' yu' both with, bein' as yu're from Missouri, an' want to be shown." And in no uncertain terms he proceeded to do so, and cautioned them.

"Why didn't yu' call on me an' tell me yore business, as yu're supposed ter do?" blustered Big George in injured tones. "I'd a-come with yu' peaceable enough. I'll make a statement ag'in yu' two fellers 'bout th' way I was man-handled."

The policeman uttered a snort of ironical amusement.

"Come peaceable 'l" he echoed. "Yes, yu'd a-come peaceable enough — yu've shown that. I've got th' marks *an* th' feel o' yore little donnies on my throat yet. I don't bear yu' no grudge fur that, though. Yu' go ahead, then, with yore statement, Mister Bloomin' Lawyer, an' I'll come back at yu' with a charge of 'resisting arrest an' assaultin' a police-officer in th' lawful execution of his duty,' fur which yu're liable to get two years extra. 'Call on yu' an' tell yu' my business' indeed! An' who's to prove I *didn't*?" he queried, with an ugly laugh. "If yu' like to call it square why, all right. But if yu' mean actin' dirty, I'll act dirty, too — an' ahead o' yu' at that."

The force of the other's argument seemed to impress the big rustler considerably, and he remained silent.

"I've got yore record from over th' Line, George," the Sergeant continued. "It's sure a peach. . . . Five years in th' State 'pen' at Huntsville, Texas. Another five in Rawlins, Wyoming.

An' three in Sante Fé, New Mexico. . . . 'Call on' a rough-neck like *yu'*? " he repeated. "With such a record as that? In th' dark — at close range — with a .45 on yore hip? 'Call on *yu'!* — an' bring my knittin'. What'd *yu'* bin doin' th' whiles? Shot me dead, most likely, or made some break that'd a-forced me to shoot *yu'* — just 'bout th' last thing I wanted to happen. No, Mister George; for reasons *yu'*ll know later, *yu'*re worth more to me alive than dead. 'Call on *yu'!* Not if I know it. I'd trust *yu'* 'bout as much as I would a grizzly, a wolf, or a 'diamond-back.' *Yu'* don't get me like them two *yu'* stretched down at Los Barancedes. Yep, I know all 'bout *that*, too. What's that? On'y 'greasers'? Mebbe — but if th' Vigilantes'd a-caught *yu'* they'd a-surely bumped *yu'* off, greasers or not. Now, see here; look," he concluded with a harsh ring in his raised voice, "*yu'* get me, once an' for all. *Yu'*re a prisoner. I know my duty as a Mounted Police-Sergeant, an' I don't have to get arguin' th' point with four-flushin', tin-horn scum like *yu'*. An' mind, now, what I said about that charge goes if *yu'* make one more break, talkin' back to me."

A hasty search of the two men's pockets, revealing nothing more dangerous than a jack-knife belonging to Scotty, he turned to Gallagher and bade him bring up the horses.

"Knot th' lines 'round th' horns o' George's an' Scotty's," he said, "an' string 'em together 'bout three foot apart with yore lariat, Barney. I want *yu'* to trail 'em. I'll come on behind."

When all was in readiness he jerked out a curt order to the captives, to "Climb aboard an' hold onta th' jug-handle!"

"'Member," he added warningly, "I'm close behind, so don't be so foolish as to chance anythin'. First man that does'll get hurt — bad."

Then, and for the first time, Big George noticed the Sergeant's mount. Speechless for the moment, he stood, pop-eyed, gaping stupidly.

"Look, look!" he ejaculated to his partner in distress; "why, that's Shorty's —" his voice failed him.

"Eyah! That's what put th' kibosh on me," commiserated poor Scotty feelingly. "He must ha' corralled *him*, too, an' th' ——'s given us away. *Must* have — who else could ha' put this feller onta us?"

Ellis, in his own saturnine fashion, chuckled grimly at this last remark. "Sure," he said; "*that's* what. Now, yu' fellers climb up *pronto*. I ain't a-goin' to hang around here all night."

In dismal silence they obeyed resignedly, and the grim little procession eventually reached the detachment. Wearily they dismounted, and the Sergeant drew Gallagher aside.

"Yu' go on in first, Barney," he whispered. "Light th' lamp, an' wake th' old feller I told yu' about. Tell him to go an' camp in th' kitchen for th' night — I'll bring him in some blankets, later. I don't want them fellers to see *him*."

The other, nodding silently, entered the building, and soon a light shone through the open door. Presently he came out again.

"All set," he said.

The Sergeant then proceeded to usher in his prisoners and, after leg-ironing them together, with a significant gesture handed the key over to Gallagher. Seen in the light the two rustlers presented a grotesquely dissimilar appearance.

Big George fully justified his soubriquet. Standing nearly six feet two, his enormous breadth of shoulder and hairy, barrel-like chest which the torn shirt revealed seemed, somehow, though, to detract from his actual height. His age might have been forty or thereabouts. On some physiognomies evil passions have imprinted their danger signals unmistakably. Fisk's sinister countenance, with its somber, desperate eyes and bushy tangle of coal-black beard which hid, one instinctively guessed, a cruel mouth and a terrible, animal-like jaw, might to many imaginations have found its prototype in the ruthless visage of a moss-trooping cattle-reiver of the Middle Ages captured, perchance, in some Border night foray.

In strange comparison to *his* formidable personality, a comparison which might have been likened to that of a coyote shackled to a grizzly bear, stood alongside him his slightly-built companion, Scotty. He had sandy hair, closely set, shifty blue eyes, and a large, loose-lipped mouth with a receding chin. It was a cunning, vicious, yet decidedly weak face and, noting its defects, one could easily imagine the truth of old Hiram Bryan's previous assertion: "Th' young chap seems ter do as he tells him."

Ellis, with seemingly careless indifference, but keeping a wary eye on Big George, removed the

handcuffs off both men. He then proceeded to relieve them of all their belongings, which he placed in separate bags that were specially made for that purpose, and numbered. Then, after making out an itemized list for each, he began to — ostentatiously — count out their money. Each of the men possessed a small quantity, and this he put in a couple of envelopes, marking the amount on the outside. Gallagher, leaning against the door, watched the performance with curious interest. He had an inkling of what was coming. Benton, seating himself, beckoned the two forward to the table. Shackled together, they awkwardly obeyed. He chose Scotty first, and reckoned up the few bills and silver belonging to that individual.

“Eight dollars and sixty-five cents,” he concluded. “That correct?” Scotty nodded. “All right, then,” said Ellis, licking up the envelope and pushing over a pen. “Look over that list an’ see’f it’s O. K. before yu’ sign for it.”

Scotty glanced through the items and nervously affixed his signature. The same procedure was gone through with Fisk. As the latter finished signing, the policeman drew the piece of foolscap towards him and, extracting a folded paper from a small wallet, leisurely compared the two specimens of caligraphy. With a satisfied sigh, he thrust them both into his pocket and looked across the table with a sinister smile at Big George.

“Mister Gordon Brown,” he murmured reflectively.

The two culprits started violently, and stared with dismay at the man who had thus outwitted them once

more. Fisk strove to recover himself. Over his perturbed, evil face there crept the blank, lifeless expression of duplicity.

"Wha's that?" he inquired innocently.

The Sergeant's smile vanished. His face hardened, and he began to speak, drawling out his words one by one.

"I'm chargin' yu' both," he said sententiously, "with stealin' a team, wagon, an' harness, valued at two hundred an' seventy-five dollars, from one, Lloyd Pryce, of Beaver Dam, on th' sixth o' June; afterwards selling the same as your own property to one, Hiram Bryan, on th' thirteenth o' th' same month." Then followed the customary warning. "That's all," he finished, "an I guess it's sure enough, too." He eyed them a moment amidst a dead silence, and then broke out irritably:

"What do th' likes o' yu' want to come over *this* Side for — peddling yore dirty work in a decent, law-abiding country? Why in h—I couldn't yu' stay where yu' both belong? Now, get yu' away back there an' sit on that bench."

Apathetically they obeyed, with the hopeless resignation of men for whom life could hold no more surprises, and which, in Fisk's case, was all the more remarkable, considering his previous belligerent attitude. It had been on the tip of the policeman's tongue to question him as to what had become of the money thus fraudulently obtained but, on second thought, he desisted. Some lie or another would be the only result of such an inquiry, he reflected; and besides, he had warned them. Gambling, he knew, was notoriously rife at the Wharnock ranch, which

136 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

was probably the true cause of its disappearance. (A correct guess, as was subsequently proved at their trial.)

Ellis looked at his watch. It was just going on midnight.

"Seems too bad — a-commandeering yu' for all this work, Barney," he said apologetically, to Gallagher.

"Oh, I ain't worryin' none, Sargint," the other answered. "I got that meat in all right, this mornin'; but there's my team I'd like to turn out inter th' pasture, a cow as should be milked, an' some chickens I wanta leave some feed out for. I guess yu'll be wantin' me inter Sabbano with yu' th' next couple o' days, eh?"

Benton nodded. "P'r'aps it's more'n likely somebody'll be around in th' mornin'," he said hopefully. "An' then yu'll be able to run on down an' do yore chores. Say, will yu' off-saddle an' fix up th' hawsses? Turn them two belonging to these fellers out in th' pasture — there won't be room for no more when yores an' Shorty's is in — an' say, Barney; bring in all th' blankets yu' can lay yore hands on in there."

In about half an hour the rancher returned, laden with a heavy bundle of the aforesaid articles, which Ellis shook down on the floor in the corner farthest from the door, subtracting two, however, for old Bryan in the kitchen.

"Yu'll have to bunk down here for th' night," he remarked curtly to the prisoners. "Yu' might as well get down to it right away, an' get all th' sleep yu' can, because it'll be a long trip tomorrow."

Wearily they rolled their coats for pillows, and curled themselves down, dormant murder gleaming in Fisk's somber, brooding eyes as he glanced now and again at the cell door whence issued the untroubled snores of Shorty.

Benton drew Gallagher on one side. "We'll have to do a 'night guard' on these fellers," he whispered. "Guess we'll do two hours apiece. I'll do th' first trick an' hand over th' watch to yu' when I'm through. Yu' go on inta my room there, an' lie on th' bed."

Slowly the night dragged through for the tired, haggard, unkempt watchers. After waking the Sergeant up at eight o'clock, the rancher went out and did the stable chores, and when he returned Ellis cooked breakfast for all hands — taking good care to keep Shorty and old Bryan aloof from their former acquaintances.

As they were finishing the meal there came a knock at the door, and on opening it the policeman was surprised to see Pryce and two other riders outside. Benton closed the door behind him and stepped forward. The rancher seemed oppressed with a certain shamefacedness, and fidgeted nervously with his quirt.

"Sargint," he began, "I guess I kinder riled yu' yesterday — actin' as I did — but I was fair mad, an' I — well, it's that cursed temper o' mine gets th' better o' me. I ask yu' to try an' forgit it."

"Oh, that's all right, Pryce," said Ellis shortly. "I'm glad yu've come around, anyways, as I was just figurin' how I was goin' to get word to yu' to come inta Sabbano." And in a few words he ac-

138 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

quainted the other with an account of the previous night's adventures.

"Well, yu' do surprise me!" exclaimed Pryce wonderingly and, with rising wrath: "Why, Big George, an' Scotty — I always give 'em th' run o' my place as if they belonged there, whenever they come a-ridin' around. Why! come to think o' it, three days before my outfit was stole, I 'member meetin' up with Scotty in th' Four-mile coulee; we was both lookin' for strayed stock — an' I mind tellin' him as me an' th' woman figured on drivin' inta Sabbano on th' Thursday, an' he asked me to bring him some Bull-Durham 'baccar from there. Guess I forgot it. Anyways, Big George, he was around about a week afterwards, an' listen! He had th' gall to tell th' woman as how what a dirty deal it was to rustle a feller's outfit, an' what th' parties deserved as did it. Where *was* them hawsses all th' time, d'yu' think, Sargin', before they sold 'em to th' old man, I mean?"

"Staked out in th' bush somewheres, I guess," said Benton. "They've both o' 'em got touches o' rope-burn around th' fetlocks. Say, who's yore friends, Pryce?"

"Two fellers as kin swear to my outfit," replied the rancher. "I brought 'em around to see it." And, turning, he introduced the men to the Sergeant.

"Well, put yore hawsses up an' come on in," said Ellis. "Don't yu' get a-talkin' to th' prisoners mind, though," he added. "Least said, soonest mended. We figure on pullin' out in 'bout an hour's time."

A clatter of wheels disturbed them and, turning, they beheld a wagon and team approaching, driven by none other than old Bob Tucker. There was something irresistibly funny in the excited motions of the dissipated, elderly Jehu, as he urged his team forward with an unending string of Afrikander expletives, which made them all burst out laughing.

"*Eyck! Eyck! Azi-wan-n! Ari-tsemah! Hambakél!*" he bawled.

The policeman stepped forward and held up his hand as the sweating horses drew near.

"*Wana!*" he shouted. "*Wacht-een-bietje!* What's bitin' yu' now, Dad?"

Tucker was tremulous and incoherent, but by degrees he managed to impart the somewhat belated news that "'is 'orses 'ad bin let aht of 'is field" during the night, and that "e 'ad fahnd 'em abaht free mile sou'west from 'is plice."

"Yu better let 'em stay out now, too," said the Sergeant. And he told the old man everything. "Yu needn't be scared of yore bunch no more now. What! Yu' didn't hear nothin' in th' night? Why, I reckon we made 'bout as much racket amongst us as yu' do a-shovin' yore old team along. I guess 'Johnny Burke' put *yu'* to sleep, all right. Yu'd better *outspan*, now yu've got here, an' turn yore team out in my pasture. We'll want yu' along with us in Sabbano as a witness. Yu' can come back with Barney Gallagher on Shorty's hawss. Yu' can ride *him*, all right — he's quiet."

Fisk looked up brazenly at the new-comers as they entered, but Scotty remained with downcast eyes, in nervous trepidation as Ellis and his visitors, with-

drawing into a corner, commenced to converse in low tones. Seeing the re-enforcements, Gallagher slipped away and departed to his ranch. When he returned, he found Pryce's wagon and team standing outside the detachment, with old Hiram Bryan occupying the driver's seat and Tucker alongside him.

Putting the stable-blankets and some hay in the bottom of the box, the Sergeant led forth the handcuffed and shackled Fisk and Robbins, and assisted them into the wagon. Shorty, for obvious reasons, he placed on the former's own horse, which was led by Gallagher. A wise precaution, considering the glances of deadly hatred which, from time to time, were exchanged between the former and Big George, each still firmly believing the other to have turned traitor. Ellis brought up the rear on the buckskin, with Shorty's rifle in a carbine sling at the saddlehorn.

It was a long, monotonous trip, but nothing untoward happened. To avoid stopping anywhere for dinner, the Sergeant had previously put in the wagon a big pack of cooked food and a jar of water; so, halting mid-day, they ate a meal and then, resuming their journey, arrived in Sabbano about sundown. Tired and dusty, they eventually drew up at the detachment.

Sergeant Churchill surveyed the party with astonishment.

"Hello! Where you klatch-um?" he inquired jocosely.

"Klatch-um allee same Chellee Kleek," responded Ellis. "Give us a hand, Churchill, an' let's get 'em

inside. Cloakey an' Wardle — them two J.P.'s of yours — are they both in town? "

" Billy Cloakey is," answered the other. " But Old John Wardle went away to th' coast a couple o' days ago, for a holiday. Don't know *when* he'll be back. What's up? Want 'em to hold a prelim'?"

" Yes," said Benton thoughtfully. " Guess I'll go an' wire the O.C. just now, to send one o' the inspectors down by the mornin' train."

As the nine-thirty west-bound train drew up at the little station next morning Benton, who was on the platform awaiting it expectantly, stepped forward and saluted a tallish, blond man, dressed in the dark-blue serge uniform of an inspector.

" Well, Sergeant," greeted the latter, " you've been doing great business, I hear? But I can't forget you're the disturber of my rest, all the same," he added, with a wry smile. " Aren't there any local J.P.'s around here who could have handled these cases?"

Ellis grinned back apologetically. " Sorry to have had to drag you out of bed so early, sir," he said. " Yes, there are a couple of resident J.P.'s here. Wardle, who runs a general store and the post-office, and Cloakey, a real estate man. Wardle's away at the coast just now, so I was forced to wire for you. Cloakey's here, though, to sit with you on these cases. Two of the men I've arrested are particularly tough, and I was anxious to get them into the Post by tonight's train, if possible."

They turned away from the station, and commenced to walk slowly up the main street.

"Have they engaged counsel?" pursued Inspector Darby. "I didn't see any one on the train I knew, coming up."

"No, sir," answered the Sergeant. "I asked them all, individually, last night, before I wired to the O.C., but none of them seemed inclined to want a lawyer when I explained that this was merely the preliminary trial. It was the same about witnesses before we left Cherry Creek. Fisk, the ringleader, starting in to bluff that: 'They'd have all the "mouthpieces" *and* witnesses they wanted, when the *real* trial came off'; so I didn't bother with them any further. But, as a matter of fact, sir, I don't see how they possibly could have any witnesses at all. They've taken pretty good care of *that* in the crooked work they've been carrying on. This is Mr. Cloakey coming down the street now. I don't think you've ever met him, have you, sir?"

The Inspector replied in the negative, as he gazed with well-bred curiosity at his prospective associate on the magisterial bench, who was just then drawing abreast of them. He beheld a big, cheery-faced, somewhat corpulent, man nearing middle age, who grasped his hand with genial warmth, as the Sergeant, with easy deference, introduced him. A few civilities were exchanged, and Ellis led the way to the detachment which, on entering, he perceived to have suddenly assumed an unwontedly tidy appearance. After hurriedly gathering his witnesses, he formally opened the court, and the preliminary inquiry began.

Shorty's case was taken first, the local sergeant guarding the other two in an inner room, so as to

be out of hearing. A sullen plea of "Not guilty" was entered to the first and second charges, "Guilty" to the third — that of "Having a weapon on his person when arrested." Dealt with summarily on this minor offense, he was given the option of paying a fine or the alternative of a short term of imprisonment with hard labor. He chose the latter.

The two principal charges — "Cattle stealing," and "Conspiring to commit an indictable offense" — were next proceeded with. Ellis, after being sworn, gave his evidence, the strange nature of which — in the former charge — relaxed even the imperturbable Inspector's judicial calm, as he and his colleague listened with unconcealed interest to the coyote episode, and viewed the half-chewed brand which the Sergeant fitted into the cut-out in the hide. Benton's testimony in both cases being largely corroborated by Gallagher, Shorty was duly committed to stand his trial at the next sitting of the Supreme Court.

The case against Fisk and Robbins was much more protracted and tedious. Charged jointly, they entered a similar plea to their confederate on each indictment. From time to time, during the proceedings, the Inspector's casual glance flickered curiously from Big George's battered physiognomy to the bruised face and scratched throat of the Sergeant. But he was a wily, old, experienced officer and, as neither side appeared anxious to enlighten him, he drew his own conclusions and wisely refrained from comment. Adjourning for lunch, and also to view the alleged stolen team and wagon, the hearing was resumed again in the afternoon, and eventually the two rustlers were committed.

Ellis then drew the attention of the Court to the case of old Hiram Bryan, who had shakily given his evidence during the trial. All huddled up, the aged, decrepit man sat there in silence, his wistful gaze wandering from face to face.

"Your Worships," he said, "in the absence of all proof of complicity, I have detained this man merely under a 'vagrancy' charge, so as to insure his appearance in this court as an all-important witness."

The two justices of the peace nodded understandingly. A whispered colloquy ensued between them, then they turned and gazed thoughtfully at the bowed figure of the broken man who was awaiting their will with the apathetic resignation peculiar to the aged. Inspector Darby, leaning forward, chin resting in hand, presently broke the silence.

"Sergeant Benton," he said, with a slight note of irresolution in his voice, "taking into consideration the somewhat cruel position that circumstances have placed this man in, it is not, of course, our intention to press that charge against him. But you no doubt realize that it is of vital importance to this last case that his evidence be forthcoming at the Supreme Court."

Ellis bowed his head in assent. He was prepared for this emergency that he had foreseen from the beginning.

"Your Worships," he said, in quiet, convincing tones, "if you see fit to discharge the accused I will hold myself personally responsible for his appearance when this case comes up at the next Sessions."

His superior turned again to his fellow justice,

and they conferred awhile in low tones. This consultation ending, the Inspector faced round once more.

"All right, Sergeant," he said.

Ellis motioned to the old man to stand up. Dully and awkwardly though the order was obeyed, the venerable face was not devoid of a certain dignity as its owner raised a pair of honest eyes and gazed back unflinchingly at his judges. The Inspector cleared his throat.

"There has been no evidence adduced in this case to prove that you had any knowledge of these men's alleged criminal actions and intent," he said, in his even, passionless tones. "Rather, it seems that you have been their unfortunate victim, for which you have this Court's sympathy. This charge of 'vagrancy' against you will be dismissed . . . but you understand that your evidence will be required again when the Supreme Court sits."

The old man gazed at him vacantly, and the Sergeant opened the door.

"All right, Bryan," he said; "you can go. I want to see you later, though."

And, clutching his hat in his trembling old hands, the other tottered slowly out.

Pryce arose. "Your Worships," he began imploringly, "how 'bout me team an' wagon? Is there any chance of me bein' able to take 'em back with me? I've got a tur'ble pile o' work to do, an' I need 'em bad."

The Inspector contemplated the rancher's anxious face thoughtfully a moment or two before replying.

"Why, yes, Mr. Pryce," he answered slowly, eyeing his confrère, who nodded his concurrence to this request. "I don't see why you shouldn't. But you will have to sign a document undertaking to produce them, if required, when this case comes up at the next Sessions, you understand."

All business being now at an end, the Sergeant formally closed the court, Inspector Darby and the congenial Mr. Cloakey departing to the hotel, and Ellis to the depot freight office with Pryce to make inquiries respecting the arrival of some police stores that were overdue. Finding that the latter had come, he arranged with the rancher to haul them out to the Cherry Creek detachment on his return trip.

With this and various other small duties the time passed rapidly, and twilight was descending when the Sergeant retraced his steps up the main street on his way back to the detachment. He felt jaded and weary from lack of sleep and the strain on his physical and mental powers during the past forty-eight hours, but a certain exultation at the thought of all that had been accomplished in that space of time buoyed him up.

In the midst of his somewhat tiredly complacent reflections he became aware of a figure approaching him unsteadily along the uneven board sidewalk whom he recognized as Hiram Bryan.

A sharp gust of wind suddenly deposited the latter's ancient battered hat in the gutter and made merry sport with his venerable wisps of hair and gray beard. Stooping to recover his headgear, he lost his balance and pitched heavily forward. He

struggled to his feet again with difficulty and leaned for a space, all covered with dust, up against the wall of the Chinese restaurant, his breath coming and going with wheezy asthmatical sobs.

Ellis presently drew up alongside and contemplated the unlovely but pitiable spectacle with a slightly compassionate grin.

"Hello, Dad," he remarked. "Where d'yu' get it? Been celebratin' along with Bob Tucker, I guess. Well, old gentleman, yu' got outa that mix-up all hunkadory, an' I was glad of it."

But the old man only rocked perilously on his heels, regarded his interlocutor somberly awhile with liquor-blurred eyes, and resolutely held his peace.

Momentarily nonplussed at the other's silence, the Sergeant continued in tones half playful, half serious:

"Come, old Kafoozleum; yu' ain't very grateful, it seems. Life an' liberty's somethin', anyhow, an' it's more than teams an' wagons — or booze. For now, see here; look! This is th' straight goods — if yu'd ever gone up in th' Ghost River bush, along with them-two fellers, either yu' or th' nitchie, they'd a-seen to it as neither o' yu' come out of it alive again to, perhaps, get a-talkin' afterwards. Yu' can take yore oath o' *that*."

"An' I hadn't bin diddled out o' me outfit," piped old Bryan doggedly, with the hopeless, unreasoning obstinacy of the aged, "I'd a-bin away from yu' all — a-livin' quiet on some little ol' homestead. But — yu' corralled me team an' wagon, lad. I'm little better'n a hobo now."

Surprise, not unmixed with amusement at this

somewhat illogical outburst, rendered Ellis speechless for the moment.

"But they *wasn't* yore team an' wagon, Dad," he said. "Th' Law —" And then he stopped, recognizing the absurdity of ever attempting to argue under such conditions. A great pity, though, for the old, broken man, welled up in his heart.

"Here, here," he began, not unkindly. "Don't get a-talkin' foolish, now, Hiram."

And his hand sought the other's shoulder. But Bryan avoided his touch.

"Nay," he said thickly. "Let be, lad. I'm an old man, an'—an' draw fast to homeward. I'll soon be in a good place, God grant—an' out o' reach o' all yore laws an' contraptions. Let be, lad. Yu've played h—l wi' me, amongst yu'."

The words of rough condolence died in the Sergeant's throat. He saw, through misty eyes, the poor old derelict, fuddled with whiskey and sorrow, go shambling on his way with bowed gray head. And the sight was more than he could stand. With a few strides he overtook the aged Hiram and, in spite of his feeble resistance, gently, but firmly, turned him around.

"I've been a-figurin' this business out—right since we come in from Cherry Creek," he said huskily. "Yu're comin' along with us on th' train to-night, Dad, when we take them prisoners down. An' I'm a-goin' to get yu' into a certain place that I know of, where yu'll be looked after good for th' rest o' yore days—Father Rouleau's Home for the aged an' infirm. Besides—I want yu' somewheres handy when that case comes off."

CHAPTER XI

*"My object all sublime
I shall achieve in time —
To let the punishment fit the crime;
The punishment fit the crime."*

THE MIKADO

THE three rustlers were tried at the following Criminal Assizes held about two months later.

Fisk, obtaining money from some unknown source, was the only one of the trio represented by counsel, retaining that eminent criminal lawyer — Denis Ryan — to defend him. Robbins' craven heart failing him at the eleventh hour, he pleaded guilty to all charges, and threw himself unreservedly upon the mercy of the Court. Shorty, actuated more by motives of spite against Big George, whom he still firmly believed to have betrayed him, entered a similar plea. Brooding over his former accomplice's imaginary perfidy during his past two months in the guardroom awaiting trial, the one thought — to "get even" with his enemy — had gradually become an obsession, which finally culminated in a deliberate intention to reverse his original plea on arraignment.

These two totally unexpected occurrences combined to render Fisk's case hopeless. His counsel, with characteristic ability, put up a brilliant and spir-

ited defense for his huge, ill-favored client; but it was a forlorn hope, and he knew it long before the jury returned with their verdict of "Guilty."

One of the most decisive factors in the case had been the evidence of the old Indian—"Roll-in-the-Mud"—who, examined through an interpreter, stated that Fisk had approached him with an offer of a five-dollar bill and one of Tucker's best colts, in return for his help in driving the bunch of horses at night up the difficult bush trail in the Ghost River district.

Sentence in each case was deferred until three days later, when the prisoners were taken to court again. Big George and Shorty, whose previous criminal records told heavily against them, were very severely dealt with by a judge whose lack of sympathy with stock rustlers was proverbial. The former, proven to be the ringleader and instigator of the crimes, received a sentence of ten years' penal servitude; the latter, seven. Scotty, being that it was, as far as could be ascertained, his first offense, and who, furthermore, was adjudged to have been the tool of Fisk and Shorty, drew the comparatively lenient sentence of four years.

The two first named took the announcement of their punishment with the silent, dogged indifference of men to whom durance vile was no new thing; but Scotty burst out into loud lamentations and weeping as the prisoners were quickly ushered downstairs to the court cells underneath.

Filled with pardonable elation at the successful termination of his cases, Benton left the courthouse and leisurely betook his way back to the Post. All

the genial *bonhomie* that his many-sided nature could command now asserted itself, and he strolled along, humming a cheery lilt, his heart merry within him. Still in this enviable frame of mind, he departed later in the day for his detachment.

That night, standing on a corner of the main street in Sabbano, idly smoking and watching the faint reflection of a far-distant prairie fire, he heard himself hailed and, turning, greeted a man who sauntered slowly across the street to him with a familiarity that bespoke long acquaintance.

"Hello, Charley," he said. "What's blown you into this jerkwater burg?"

The other struck a match and relit his cigar before replying, disclosing a gaunt, lined, intellectual face with a grim mouth, which was somewhat accentuated by a close-cropped, grizzled military mustache.

"Case," he answered laconically. "Say, Ellis, where's Churchill? He's stationed here, isn't he?"

Benton nodded. "Yes," he said; "but he's been in the Post, now, for three days — waitin' for a case of his to come off at Supreme Court. He was there when I came away this afternoon. Why? What d'you want *him* for?"

"M-m! Oh, nothing in particular," his companion mumbled. "Just wondered where he was, that's all."

The newcomer deserves a more especial mention, for his history was a sad, though not an uncommon one. Charles Musgrave, M.D., had begun life as a clever young house-surgeon attached to a famous London hospital. Possessing extraordinary daring ability, inspired by a genuine love for his profession,

he gradually obtained a reputation that caused him to be regarded as one of the foremost exponents of surgery of his day. Then it was — unluckily for him — at the zenith of his fame, that he became enamored of lovely Blanche Farrel — then a nurse in St. John's Hospital.

It was the old, time-worn, sordid story that the world is weary of — his wife's education and morality proved to be inferior to her beauty. After enduring two soul-wracking years of jealousy and humiliation as the result of the unfortunate misalliance that he had contracted, he obtained a divorce, and, abandoning his career, went to South Africa, where he strove to efface the bitter memories of his past misery amidst the vast whirlpool of cosmopolitan adventurers that thronged the Rand.

Still retaining the skill and love of his profession that had once created him a power amongst his fellow-men, he rapidly acquired an immense practise in Johannesburg. This, coupled with various lucky mining speculations, enabled him in a few years to amass a considerable fortune which, alas, was doomed, however, to be swept away, along with thousands of others, at the commencement of the great war. Declining, then, the offer of an important position at the Wynberg base-hospital, he became the principal medical officer of the Irregular Horse, which Ellis had joined — composed mainly of his fellow-refugees of the Rand. Possessing much personal bravery, he served throughout the war with great gallantry, exhibiting on many occasions such an utter disregard for his own life whilst at-

tending wounded men under fire, that frequently caused him to be mentioned in despatches.

The climax of that long-protracted, bitter struggle, leaving him an impoverished man once more, he forsook the country that had engulfed his second fortune and prospects. Still resolutely turning his face away from England, he came to Western Canada, where his ability in his profession speedily raised him again in the medical world. Here, working hard and drinking obstinately, he led an existence which, if it was not commendable, was only in accord with that of many others whom Fate and the vicissitudes of life have entreated thus unkindly.

Most men can, and invariably do, recover from the first benumbing effects of misfortune, but — they cannot *forget*. In appearance the doctor was a rather distinguished-looking man, tall and powerfully-built, with closely cropped iron-gray hair, and a complexion that was bronzed and roughened by years of exposure to a tropical sun. That worn, haggard face of his, though, told a real tale. The furrows there had been plowed by an enduring bitterness, and though only in his forty-fifth year, he looked considerably older.

Exchanging a few desultory remarks, they strolled on down the sidewalk and, passing the station, drew near to the last of the scattered houses. During their progress Ellis had been aware of light footsteps following them and, glancing back once or twice, had noticed a woman approaching. Soon she caught up to them and, thinking that she was about to pass, he drew in close to Musgrave to give her

room to get by. Presently she came alongside and, to his utter surprise, a sweet, girlish voice said, coaxingly:

"Why, hello, Church'; coming in?" And a hand caught his that hung at his side and gave it a gentle squeeze.

They were just within the glare of one of the few street lamps that the ill-lighted little town boasted, and opposite the gate of the end cottage. He beheld a girl, whose age he might have computed at anything between eighteen and twenty-five — tall, and voluptuously formed, with thick masses of dark hair that curled in little wavy tendrils around a broad, low, white forehead with level brows. Her complexion still retained the soft bloom of that of a healthy country girl, and a pair of bewitching dark-brown eyes flashed into his with a fluttering self-consciousness that told him many things.

Musgrave took a step or two forward and, turning, contemplated the scene with lazy curiosity, not unmingled with amusement. Sheer astonishment tied Benton's tongue for an instant, then:

"Sorry, sister," he said gravely. "Guess you've got the wrong number. Better ring up again."

The girl uttered a little gasping giggle of surprise.

"Oh," she said; "I thought you were the *other* policeman."

She fidgeted a little at his silent regard and clicked the gate open, continuing:

"Well — you look a pretty nice boy!"

But the words, though light and brazen in themselves, rang false, and betrayed the novice. She

began to flinch under the steady stare of those calm, watchful, passionless eyes and, returning his look with a slight air of defiance, twisted and untwisted her gloves with a little nervous laugh.

Ellis hesitated. He was no Joseph — this was Churchill's district, and *his* look-out, was his first impulsive reflection. But something — something that was, perhaps, *childish*, in the girl's great dark eyes and winsome face, in which there still remained a trace of her lost innocence and her self-conscious voice and manner, held him awhile longer, motionless.

And, as the man continued to stand there with bent head, curiously still, as if carved in stone, just looking — and *looking* — in deep, thoughtful silence at the wanton young beauty who sought to tempt him, the filmy, transparent outlines of *another* face, it seemed to him, rose up alongside hers.

The sweetly grave, spiritual face of a girl, long since dead, whose love had once been his — the very incarnation of womanly purity.

"Yes," he mused, "that was it — that was it begad! it was the *eyes*. . . . they were very, very like poor Eileen's."

Presently he cleared his throat and began to speak.

"See here; look, Mandy," he said soberly. "If I was doing my duty properly I should just take *you* down to the police station, lock you up, an' put a charge against you that a certain section of the Criminal Code prescribes for your offense. D'you get me?"

She shivered and paled a little, and her great eyes opened wide as she searched his face beseechingly,

as if trying to discern whether he was in earnest. There was no banter in his tones, so she came closer and, catching his hand again, looked into his face with a forlorn sort of smile that was at once both roguish and pitiful.

"D'you mean that, or are you on'y just foolin', Policeman?" she implored. "You wouldn't arrest me, would you?"

The Sergeant contemplated her thoughtfully. And a great pity arose in him, for the fingers that clasped his own were deadly cold, and the cheap finery that she was clad in was but a miserable fence against the chilly wind that had sprung up.

"Now listen," he said. "*You* haven't been in business long, my girl. You can't fool me. Quit it, kid, before you get in *real* wrong. Get back to th' farm again."

She stared at him with open-eyed astonishment.

"Why!" she gasped; "who told you I come from a farm?"

He laughed quietly. "Just a sayin' sister," he said. "Seems I wasn't far out, eh? Where *do* you come from, then?"

But her lips only trembled and closed tightly, as she regarded him now steadfastly, in dogged silence.

"Now, see here; look," Ellis went on slowly. "If it's because you're up against it an' want money, why—" He drew out a five-dollar bill from his pocket and closed her fingers gently over it.

The kind ring in his voice unnerved her. She looked at him vaguely for a few seconds with heaving bosom and glistening, tear-filled eyes, then suddenly burst out into passionate sobbing.

"Oh!" she wailed between the convulsive spasms of emotion that shook her. "Oh, my God! D'you think I'd be doin' this if we didn't! No, no! Oh, dear!"

The Sergeant's brows contracted with a sudden, sharp, lowering glance.

"Who's *we*?" he inquired with significant interest.

With a few long-drawn, shuddering sobs, like a child that has been scolded for crying, she quieted down curiously at his question and, presently pulling out a handkerchief, began to dry her eyes.

He reiterated his query, but she only stared back at him with dumb, though not defiant, obstinacy, as before.

"You stayin' *here*?" He indicated the cottage. She nodded. He turned on his heel and prepared to depart.

"You go in then, kid; you're cold," he said. "You be a good girl, now, an' don't get chippyin' round no more or you'll be gettin' into trouble. Good night."

And, leaving her gazing after him wistfully, he rejoined the waiting doctor, and they moved off slowly back the way they had come.

"Moral reformer, eh! for a change?" Musgrave remarked with a flippant, gibing laugh. "Well, it isn't worse than many of your vagaries. We shall have you entering Holy Orders next, I suppose?"

In his heart the savage old cynic approved; but, for the life of him, he could not check the sneer.

Ellis made no reply. It was a habit of his very

often not to answer Charley, and the latter did not mind it in the least.

"Now listen," pursued Musgrave. "I'll tell *you* something now. I've been here for two days. Langley, who owns the hotel here, is an old patient of mine. He wired me to come down an' see a man who was ill in his place — chap asked him to get a doctor. Rattray, the medico here, is in hospital himself, undergoing an operation for appendicitis, so I came along. Now, I'm a specialist. I don't undervalue *my* professional services in the least, I can assure you. Quit that, years ago. I have my fee. Those that don't care to pay it are welcome to get somebody else — that's all there's to it. Now — coming back to this case in hand — naturally, after having to come all the way down here, one of the first things I did was to sound Langley as to my prospective patient's financial stability. May sound mercenary, or merciless, whichever you please — to *you* — but, as I said before — Well, Langley said he was all right, as far as he knew. Seemed to have plenty of money — has paid up square enough during the week or so he's been in the hotel — was an absolute stranger to him — registered as John Walters, from Toronto — said he'd been sick for a couple of days. So I went upstairs to have a look at him. He looks to me like a clerk, counter-jumper — town-bred, anyway — might be anything — I don't know what his line in life is — never asked him. He must have divined that I'd been questioning Langley about him, for one of the first things he said to me was: 'Money's all right, Doctor. Oh, I've got plenty of "dough."' And

he fumbles under the bedclothes and shakes three or four *hundred-dollar* bills at me. *Hundred-dollar* ones, mind you! Afterwards, when I was examining him, I found he was wearing a leather money-belt next to his skin — you know — the kind we used to have in South Africa, with pockets all round. I don't know, of course, how much he's got in it; but he hangs on to it mighty close, and seems very nervous and suspicious. He's a pretty sick man, anyway. I may have to rush him into town to one of the hospitals, and operate on him right away. I'm just waiting for a certain symptom to show up. Now, here's one of the queerest parts about this business. The morning after he'd put up at the hotel — so Langley tells me — *this girl* came here, along with some chap. Whether they're man and wife, or not, I couldn't say; they're living together *as* such, at all events, and they've rented that cottage. What the fellow's name is I don't know, or what his business here is, either. He dresses fairly well, and he's got good looks — of a certain type. But it sure is a d—d bad face, all the same. Typical 'white-slaver's.' Well, yesterday afternoon I went upstairs to see my patient. I'd just got to the landing where his room is, when I heard somebody talking to him — in precious loud, ugly tones, too. I heard this: 'Yer thought yer could "shake" me — hidin' away in this burg, eh? Now, look a-here. I'm nigh broke — you're flush. If yer don't come across quick, I'm a-goin' to start somethin'. I've bin here close on a week now, an' I ain't a-goin' to wait no longer!'

"I promptly opened the door and stepped in, and

here was my gentleman, standing by the side of Walters' bed. The expression on his mug was anything but sweet, and as for Walters — he was all in — collapsed, absolutely. 'What's the trouble?' I said. 'Oh, nothin',' says Mr. Man, kind of off-hand; 'just a-talkin' over a little business matter with my friend, here.' 'Well, now look here,' I said; 'I'm the doctor attending this man. He isn't in a fit condition to talk business to anybody, especially *your* kind. Just *look* at him, man! Now, you get straight out of here — right now. I'm not going to have you worrying this man in the condition that he's in; and remember, you're to stay out — for good. You keep away from here altogether, or I'll d—d soon take steps to make you. D'you hear?' He looked at me in a precious mean, ugly sort of way, but he slunk out, and he hasn't been near Walters since. That's *why* I wanted Churchill. Looks now as if *he* might know something, eh?"

Ellis uttered a short, mirthless laugh. "That's what," he answered succinctly.

They walked on in silence for awhile.

"It's like this," resumed Musgrave. "I'm purely and simply in the position of a doctor called in to see a patient. As long as I'm remunerated for my professional services it's none of *my* business to go poking about, prying into other people's affairs, and I don't intend to in this case. That's up to *you*. But, all the same, the whole thing seems a kind of a rum go, and I thought I'd better mention it to one of you. Whatever's this fellow, Walters, going around with all this money cached on him for? keeping indoors always, religiously, at night — so Lang-

ley says . . . of no occupation — never speaking to anybody if he can help it . . . as mum as you please. . . . Never letting on to Langley, or any one, that he knew this other chap, either. Then this talk I overheard in his bedroom . . . proper blackmail. The plot thickens — ahem! I think we'd better temporarily assume the respective rôles of Sherlock Holmes and his pal, Dr. Watson, to clear up this dark mystery," he concluded, with a melodramatic chuckle.

The Sergeant nodded, with a thoughtful grin.

"M-m, yes! it sure does look kind of queer," he murmured. "Guess I'll take a *dekho* at both these ginks tomorrow, Charley, before I pull out to the Creek. That girl, for instance. You can take your oath she's just travelin' with that chap. Been enticed away from some little country burg — you know the ways and means these brutes have o' working these things? Once away from home they're done for, and scared to go back. He must be just usin' her as a decoy-duck for some rotten business best known to himself, but you could see how green she was. Churchill — what? the d—d fool — riskin' his job — gossipy one-horse *dorp* like this!"

They had reached the door of the hotel.

"Well, I'm going to turn in," said the doctor. "Sure you won't come in and have a drink?"

Ellis shook his head. "No, thanks, Charley," he said; "I'll enjoy one better tomorrow. See you then. Good night, old man."

And he walked slowly on towards the detachment. Half an hour later he threw aside the paper that he had been reading and, yawning wearily, prepared

to go to bed. Suddenly, there came to him the remembrance of some mail matter that he had brought with him from the Post, and which he had neglected to look at as yet. Mechanically he felt in his pockets. No! — it wasn't there — must have left it in his red serge when he changed into his stable-jacket. His surmise was correct, and presently he began to tear the envelopes open, glancing carelessly through their various contents. Well, well, the General Orders for the current month, his shoeing account returned with a small mistake in it, a peremptory request — obviously dictated from the Quartermaster's Store — anent having his Monthly Returns despatched at a somewhat earlier date than had hitherto been his habit . . . nothing very *important*, there. What did Dudley mean? Hello! What was *this*? He had drawn from the last envelope a typewritten copy of a circular. He stared vaguely at the headlines of the notice, which ran:

WANTED FOR MURDER AND BURGLARY
\$500 REWARD

The above amount will be paid to any one giving information that will lead to the arrest of either of the below-described men, who, on the night of August 28th, 190 — in company with one — Joseph Lipinski, alias George Winters — since arrested in Seattle — shot and killed, John Hetherington, night-watchman of the Carter-Marchmont Trust Building, who surprised them in the act of robbing the safe in the Company's offices, in New Axminster, B. C.

Description. No. 1. Henry Shapiro (alias Harvey Stone, alias Nathan Porter). Known to the Chicago police as "Harry the Mack." Age 37; 5 ft. 11 in.;

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 163

about 190 lbs.; black hair; has peculiar light gray eyes, with slight cast in the left one; complexion, swarthy; clean shaved; is of Jewish descent; nationality, American; —

Followed details of dress and general habits.
Concluding:

Lipinski, in a statement that he has made, alleges that it was Shapiro who fired the shot which killed Hetherington. Was a former prison mate of Shapiro's in Elmira Penitentiary, where the latter was serving a term of five years for safe-blowing. This man has a criminal record also, he says, in Chicago, and has served a three-year term in Joliet, Ill., on a charge of white slavery. We are endeavoring to obtain his photo, Bertillon measurements, and finger-print classification from one of these institutions.

No. 2. Herbert Wilks. Age 26; 5 ft. 8 or 9; about 165 lbs.; blue eyes; brown hair; complexion, fresh; clean shaved; nationality, Canadian; dressed in a dark-blue serge suit; gray Fedora hat, with black band round it; brown boots. This man is a former employee of the Trust Co., and was discharged by them two days previous to the date on which these crimes were committed. As far as is known, he has no record and has never been in trouble before. Has the reputation of being quite a sport. Possesses a jaunty air, drinks heavily, is a cigarette fiend, carries a cane, and is said to be fond of women. Comes from Hamilton, Ont., and is believed to have relatives there. Lipinski states that Wilks must have the bulk of the money (approximately \$2,000.00) that was stolen, as he had quit them earlier, leaving the safe open, in which they only found \$150.00. That they were in the act of splitting this when they were surprised by the watchman. That they separated and ran different ways immediately after the murder, being

164 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

fired at by the patrolman on the beat, who had heard the shot. Has not seen either of them since, and has no idea which way they went. Had often seen Shapiro in company with a woman, whom he did not know. The greater part of the money stolen is in the shape of Bank of Commerce bills of large denominations, which they may have difficulty in changing.

Wire all information to

JOHN MASON,
Chief Constable.

Below, ran the usual injunctions:

Members of Line, or other detachments are notified to keep a sharp look-out for these men, who may have come East.

(Signed) R. B. BARGRAVE, *Supt.*
Officer Commanding L. Divn.

For some few seconds the Sergeant sat perfectly motionless, failing at first to grasp the full significance of what he had just read, the typed characters of the circular appearing but a mere indistinct blurr to his abstracted eyes. Then, slowly but surely, the conviction grew in his mind that here — *here* in his hand, he held, undoubtedly, the very key to the mystery that Musgrave had confided to him that night.

“Well, I’ll be ——!” he ejaculated softly to himself. He looked again at the date of the crime. “Ten days ago. Holy Doodle! they must have been a bloomin’ long time makin’ up their minds to wire East, or I’d have got this long ago. S’pose they figured they had ’em corralled all hunkadory in the town somewhere . . . couldn’t get away . . . or, when they nailed this Lipinski man in Seattle,

that they'd all beat it the same road. Ten days . . . an' this chap — Walters, as he calls himself — has been here for a little over a week. That fits in O. K."

His headache now completely forgotten, he sprang to his feet and buckled on his side-arms beneath his stable-jacket; then, putting on his hat, he extinguished the light and slipped stealthily out of the detachment into the dark of the night.

"Here goes for that five hundred 'bucks,'" he muttered grimly. "No use wastin' time over Walters. *He* can't run away. Let's have a *dekho* at this Mr. Shapiro — if it *is* him. Why in thunder should they choose *this* place of all places to get playin' hide-an'-seek in? Well, I guess we'll know later."

Entering the lane that lay at the rear of the buildings paralleling the main street, he strode swiftly and silently back towards the cottage where the girl had informed him she was staying. As he approached it there came through the stillness a smothered murmur of voices and, presently the low-pitched, guarded tones of a man's growling bass, mixed with a woman's sobbing, reached his ears.

Quickening his pace, he noiselessly drew near the scene of the altercation, the thick carpet of dust effectually deadening his footsteps. There, under the light of the lamp, he beheld the figures of a man and a woman, the latter unmistakably the young would-be "Delilah" who had accosted him earlier in the evening.

"How come you to make such a — fool break as that?" came the man's voice, fierce and indistinct

with passion. "*He ain't th' cop that's here reg'lar. He's easy, that guy. This feller, he knows me — beat me up one time — him. I — By G—d! I believe you were a-puttin' him wise!*"

The girl's weeping response was inaudible to the listening policeman, but it only seemed to add fresh fuel to her persecutor's rage for, with an inarticulate snarl, he struck at her savagely and, with a piteous, heart-broken cry, she reeled back from the cruel blow.

The sight maddened Ellis and, with an angry shout, he sprang forward. The man, who hitherto had been standing with his back to the light, now swung sharply around at the interruption. In a flash the Sergeant recognized that face again. It was "*Harry*"—the man who had robbed the woman on the train, and whom he had thrashed so severely some two months earlier.

Like lightning both men's hands streaked to their hips, but the yeggman was the quicker of the two. The girl saw his action and, with a hasty movement, flung herself between the combatants with raised, protesting hands.

"No, no, no! *Harry, don't!*" she screamed.

But, simultaneous with her cry, came the flash and crack of his gun. Staggering with the shock of the bullet, she clutched at her bosom in stupid bewilderment.

"Oh, God!" she gasped in her agony. "Oh, bub-bub-bub!" And, swaying with a side-long lurch, she fell heavily to the ground.

For a few seconds the two men remained motionless, stupefied at the tragedy that had been enacted

before their eyes. Then the policeman's gun spoke and, with a groaning blasphemy, Harry reeled back, dangling a shattered left wrist that he had flung up instinctively to shield his head.

Again and again the Sergeant pressed the trigger, but a succession of empty clicks were all that followed. With dismay he then recollected expending four fruitless long-range shots at a coyote that evening whilst exercising Johnny, and neglecting to reload.

He was at the other's mercy. But that individual, seemingly demoralized by the excruciating torture of his wound, failed to profit by his advantage. Still clutching his gun, he wheeled around and dashed for the railroad track.

In feverish haste Ellis ejected the spent shells, dragged forth three more cartridges and, thrusting them into the cylinder of his weapon, with the practised flip of the finished gun-fighter, flung two more shots after the fugitive, who had recoiled from his sudden contact with the barbed-wire fence that ran alongside the track.

At the second report Harry pitched forward on his face, but the next moment he had rolled under the lower strand of the wire, arisen to his feet again and limped away in the gloom, heading for the station. Benton's first fierce impulse was to follow in immediate pursuit, but a low moan of intense half-conscious agony from the stricken girl checked him.

"Can't get far winged like that, anyway," he muttered. "I'll get him later."

Stooping down, he gently gathered up the inanimate body in his powerful arms and strode to-

wards the cottage with his burden. The head, with its soft mass of curly dark hair, lolling over helplessly against his shoulder like a tired child's, whilst the bright arterial blood pumped in quick jets from the bullet wound in her breast all down the front of his stable-jacket.

With an impatient thrust of his knee, he burst open the gate and, climbing the few steps, entered through the open door into the front room, where a lamp was burning. Here he deposited the girl on a low couch.

Attracted by the shots, soon there came the sounds of hurrying feet and the murmur of many voices and, presently, a small concourse of excited and curious people began to gather in front of the cottage where the light was showing through the open door. The Sergeant stepped forward hastily.

"Quick!" he said. "One of you run up to the hotel and get Dr. Musgrave; he's staying there. Quick! By G—d! This girl's been shot, and she's bleedin' to death!"

And, in response to his appeal, two figures immediately detached themselves from the gathering and sped away. Turning back to the couch, he knelt down and, ripping open the girl's flimsy blouse, rolled his handkerchief into a pad and pressed it tightly over the wound. She lay quite still, with closed eyes, groaning occasionally with the deadly pain that wracked her, a bloody foam bubbling up from her lips at each gasping breath. Soon Musgrave came bursting in.

"Why, what's this?" he said breathlessly.

"That fellow — with her," answered Ellis dis-jointedly. "Wanted for murder — B.C. — went to arrest him — shot at me — hit her — instead — Can't tell you now — Here, Charley! — look after her — goin' after him — not far away — hit bad."

He was on his feet as he spoke, swiftly ramming fresh shells into his gun; and, with one last look at the unconscious face, he jumped down the steps and started for the station via the direction that Harry had taken. A few of the more adventurous spirits attempted to follow him but he peremptorily ordered them back. Catching sight, though, of a face that he knew, he hastily beckoned its owner aside.

"See here; look, Wardle!" he said, in a tense undertone to the kindly-faced old man who officiated as postmaster in the little town. "I'm glad you're here. There's a girl in the house there, who's been shot up pretty bad, an' I think it's all up with her." He rapidly explained the situation to the other, adding: "You're a J.P. . . . Don't attempt to worry her if she's too far gone, remember, but try an' get a deposition off her if the doctor will allow it, an' get him an' somebody else to witness it. . . . Can't stop now — got to get after this chap, quick!" And he hurried away.

A man swinging a railroad lamp came forward and accosted him, whom he recognized as the station agent.

"Look, now, Carey," he said significantly, in response to the other's excited offer of help. "Come, if you want to. But I tell you flat — you're takin'

a big chance of gettin' hurt. Douse that cursed light," he added irritably, "or you'll be makin' a proper mark of us."

The other promptly obeyed, and presently they reached the beginning of the platform. The Sergeant produced a small electric torch.

"Should be some blood to trail him by," he muttered. "I got him twice. Hello! here it is!"

Pressing the button at intervals, they followed the faint dribbles and spots along the ties. Clear past the station offices and freight shed, it led them, right to the shelving terminus of the platform, where they brought up a dozen or so yards beyond when the blood marks suddenly ceased.

"What place is that?" whispered the policeman, indicating a small structure whose shadowy outlines loomed up vaguely against the surrounding gloom.

"Section men's hut," the agent whispered back. "There's only some tools and a handcar in there. It's locked, though, and Petersen, the section boss, has the key. He can't get in there. Let's go on a piece — we may pick it up again."

They crept cautiously on for a short distance, but the sanguinary trail failed to reappear.

"No use goin' any farther," protested Ellis, in a low tone. "P'r'aps he's doubled back an' cached himself under the platform."

They retraced their steps and soon picked up the blood spots again. Benton, gun in hand, halted irresolutely in front of the section hut.

"You *sure* it's locked, Carey?" he said.

The other moved ahead impatiently. "Yes,

sure," he answered. "It's no good lookin' there, Sergeant — let's rout around the platform."

A sudden impulse, though, moved Ellis to step over to the shed. Grasping the door handle, he pulled on it. To his surprise it swung open.

The next instant there came a rattle as of tools being displaced as a dark form arose. Followed a blinding spurt of flame and a deafening report right, it seemed, in his very face. Instinctively, he winced away, with a burning pain in his left ear and, ducking down, with deadly calculation he fired upwards twice as he did so.

The detonation in the galvanized-iron structure was terrific. When the echoes gradually died away, a curious scraping, threshing noise, monotonous in its regularity, succeeded, coupled with a horrid, long-drawn, liquid gurgle, as of water issuing from the neck of an inverted bottle.

These ominous sounds, too, eventually ceased, and the silence of the night settled over all once more. Carey clutched Benton with a shiver, and his teeth chattered like castanets.

"Is — is he — dead — d'you think?" he quavered.

"Don't know," returned Benton in a low voice. "Sufferin' Moses! my ear's hurtin' me somethin' fierce. I'm bleedin' like a stuck pig. Keep you well to the side, there, when I flash the light in. You never know what's goin' to come off."

Cautiously he pressed the spring of his torch and, as the little halo of radiance penetrated the obscurity, he gave a quick, searching look. With a satisfied

sigh, he released the button and turned in the darkness to his companion.

"All right, Carey," he said reassuringly. "You can light up again now."

With shaking fingers, the other produced a match and, relighting his lamp, cast its rays into the opening. He beheld a sight that was to remain in his memory for many a day. With a cry of horror, he tumbled back, the lantern falling from his nerveless grasp.

"Oh, my God!" he cried. "Oh, Lord!"

Ellis stooped and picked up the smoking globe.

"Here, here!" he remonstrated callously. "What's wrong with you, Carey? Get a hold of yourself, man. You're a peach to want to come man-hunting, you are. Have you never seen a stiff before? Get in an' have a good look at everythin', because you'll most likely be an important witness at the inquest. . . . O-oh!" he broke off, with a sharp intake of his breath, "my ear's givin' me h—l. Lend me your handkerchief."

Thus urged, and trembling violently with horror and repugnance, the agent nerved himself again to the ordeal. Raising the lamp once more, he gazed with morbid fascination at the ominous heap that but a short while back had been a strong, hot-blooded man.

With the handkerchief pressed to his wound, and cursing softly with the pain, the Sergeant jerked his gun back into its holster again. Stepping forward, he inspected his handiwork critically. The two heavy, smashing bullets of the Colt's .45, fired at close range, had done their deadly work effectively.

One, penetrating a little beneath the left eye, had blown away a portion of the skull in its exit, whilst the other, tearing its passage through the thick, bull throat, had turned the place into a veritable shambles.

Still clutched in the stiffened right hand was a huge, unfamiliar type of pistol, which weapon the policeman examined with curious interest, coming — as it nearly had — to ending *his* earthly existence. The terrible simplicity of the creed that was his in such matters forbade his evincing the slightest vestige of pity or remorse for his dead enemy. The vision of a pale, pinched-faced young mother, with a little child, seemed to arise before his eyes, and the heart-broken cry of a stricken girl still rang in his ears and hardened his heart.

“Blast you!” he muttered savagely. “You only got what was comin’ to you. It was me or you, this trip, an’ no error. You had an even break, anyway.”

The agent turned aside, shaking in every limb.

“Let’s get!” he said, with an oath. “Ugh! I can’t stand it no longer. I guess sights and happenings like this ain’t nothing to you, Sergeant . . . you’re used to it in your line of business. Besides, you’ve been through a war and must have killed and seen lots of fellers killed before. It don’t turn you up like it does me. Come away, for the love of God. By Gosh! but I could have sworn that place was locked. Petersen must have forgot to snap the padlock. I’ve got a duplicate key here. Guess I’d better lock everything up tight, eh? and give you the key.”

"Yes," said Ellis. "And give Petersen strict orders not to open it up again till I say so. Nothing's got to be touched till the coroner gives the word. Old Corbett acts in this district. Wonder whether he's at his place?"

"Oh, he's there, all right," said Carey. "But he's sick — all crippled up with rheumatism. His daughter — you know, the one that rides — she was in today and I was talking to her."

"That settles it," said Benton. "I'm goin' to wire the O.C. now, an' I'll get him to send a coroner down by the mornin' train. Let's have that key for a bit. I want the doctor to have a look at this body."

Some twenty minutes later he returned to the cottage. Musgrave and old Wardle met him on the threshold, and the former, with a significant gesture enjoining silence, softly closed the door. With the light of a strange exultation showing in his haggard face and bloodshot eyes, he proceeded to acquaint them with all that had happened. They listened with eager curiosity.

"Whew! — some shave, all right," remarked the doctor. "Here, Ellis! Let's fix up that ear of yours. You're bleeding like the deuce, and that tunic of yours is soaked." And, as Benton removed the handkerchief, "Why, man, it's clipped the lobe clean away! Come on in, then, but be as quiet as you can — I've put her on the bed in the other room. I've given her a strong morphine injection to ease the pain. It'll keep her quiet for a time."

He turned, with his hand on the doorknob, but Ellis caught him by the arm.

"Charley," he said, with a catch in his voice. "That girl saved me. Is she — is there any —"

"No," answered the doctor quietly. "That slug's gone slap through the right lung and out under the shoulder. She's done for, though she may live for a few hours. Must have been an awful high-pressure gun that he used."

"It sure was," said the Sergeant. "It was one of those German 'Lugers.' You'll see it still clutched in his fist when you go down there."

"Eh, laad!" said the kindly old postmaster, who originally hailed from Yorkshire. "But she's rare an' weak . . . an' th' doctor don't think as 'er'll last th' night out. It's nobbut o' a deposition she were able to gie us, th' poor lass, for 'er could scarce-lins speak, an' I had'na th' heart to worrit 'er. She says as 'ow 'er name's Elsie Baxter, an' that yon man o' 'ers as she calls 'Arry — shot at yo' but 'it 'er, instead, accidental, when she got betune ye. She wouldn't tell me where 'er coom fra', tho', or what 'is other name be. Fair frightened, 'er is, 'bout 'im bein' ketched, an' 'er keeps on a-cryin' out 'is name real pitiful-like, an' sayin' as 'e did'na *mean* to shoot 'er. I 'ad 'Arry Langley, from th' 'otel, in there, an' 'im an' th' doctor's witnessed it. Did yo' say yo' gaffled 'un, laad?"

The Sergeant, with his brooding mind still obsessed with the memory of his recent conflict, regarded his questioner absently, with a livid, scowling face.

"Eyah!" he snarled darkly, with an ugly oath, and with grimly unconscious humor imitating the other's dialect: "A gaffled 'un, all right, Dad! —

176 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

nobbled 'un proper. A knows 'un's name, too, an' all 'bout 'un!"

Quickly and deftly, the doctor dressed the Sergeant's torn ear, bandaging the wound with an antiseptic pad against it. Whilst this was in progress, they conversed in low tones.

"Why, come to think of it," said Musgrave, "I remember now seeing an account of that business in the paper, at the time. Lord! I was slow — not to have tumbled before. I wouldn't make much of a sleuth, I'm afraid." He carefully replaced his surgical apparatus in his bag. "Didn't you see it?" he inquired.

Ellis shrugged indifferently. "Lord, no!" he said. "Why, I go from a month on end and never *see* a paper — out there at the 'Creek.' Besides, we don't go by the *papers*. I was officially notified in this case. 'Course, I'm not forgettin' if it hadn't been for you tellin' me what you did, I'd never been able to connect up."

He was silent for a moment or two. "How about the other chap, Charley? Walters — Wilks — or whatever his name is," he asked, a trifle anxiously. "I suppose it'll be safe enough to leave *him* till tomorrow?"

"Oh, sure," said the doctor reassuringly. "I don't think he's exactly able to 'take up his bed and walk' *just* yet. I'll keep an eye on *him*. There! that'll do for the time. I'll fix it up again tomorrow for you."

With a weary yawn, Benton arose from the chair on which he had been sitting during the ear-dressing process.

"Here's the key of that section house, Charley," he said, handing the other over that article. "Take a run on down there, will you? an' have a look at that body. I'll stay an' watch this poor kid. An' say! I can't very well wear *this!*"—he indicated his ensanguined stable-jacket—"you might bring me back my serge, old man! It's lying on the bed in the detachment."

"All right. I'll go now," said Musgrave. "Remember," he added, "the kindest thing you can do is to keep her as quiet as possible. I've done all that I'm medically able to do, but it's a parson *she* needs—more than a doctor. Aren't there any here?"

"Yes," said Ellis listlessly, "on Sundays. There's denominations galore represented *then*. This is a sanctimonious little '*dorp*.' The Church of England man is the only one resident here, though. He's away in town—attending the Church Convention. I was talking to him this morning when I was going to court, an' he said he didn't expect to come back till the day after tomorrow."

"Well, she's sleeping now," said the doctor. "I've stopped the external bleeding and given her a strong morphine injection, as I think I told you. Give her all the water she wants to drink, if she wakes up, but beyond getting the necessary particulars regarding her, I wouldn't encourage her to talk. Come on, Wardle! We'll go on down to this place."

The two men tip-toed out softly and closed the door, whilst the Sergeant, carefully stripping off his blood-stained stable-jacket, entered the bedroom

noiselessly, and seated himself at the side of the suffering girl. Still under the influence of the powerful drug, she was dozing peacefully and, but for an occasional gurgle of blood in her throat, her breathing was considerably less labored.

Long and earnestly he gazed at the face of the girl who had, undoubtedly, saved his life, though at the forfeit of her own. The features were already pinched and drawn, and the rich color of the cheeks had faded to a dull, ashen gray, save where two hectic spots indicated her rising temperature. For, upon that countenance, the Angel of Death had set his dread seal, and passed upon his way.

Oppressed by deep pity and many troubled thoughts, Ellis sank into a gloomy reverie from which he was aroused by Musgrave returning — alone. Arising quietly, he obeyed the other's silent motion and followed him outside.

"Well," he said listlessly, slipping on the red serge which his companion handed to him, "did you see him, Charley?"

Musgrave glanced curiously at the powerful, still profile of the man before him.

"Yes," he said slowly. And even *his* trained nerves could not suppress a slight shudder at the remembrance. "Poor old Wardle's gone home feeling pretty sick, I can tell you . . . an' I don't wonder. You're some bad man with a gun, Ellis."

The Sergeant, with mind sunk in a fit of abstraction, eyed him absently.

"Eyah," he said. "I guess I put the sign on him, all right."

The doctor scrutinized the drawn, blood-stained face closely.

"Look here," he said kindly. "You look a bit strapped, old man. You go on home to bed now. *I'll stop with the girl!*"

The considerate words seemed to arouse the other strangely.

"No, by ——!" he said vehemently, with a sobbing oath. "I'm goin' to stay till — till —"

His voice broke. Recovering himself, he continued, with an effort:

"It's the least I can do. You can sleep on that couch in the front room. I'll call you if she's in bad pain."

"All right — all right!" answered Musgrave gently and, gripping the Sergeant's shoulder with a sympathetic pressure, "we won't fight over it, old man. I understand. Call me if I'm needed. I don't think your 'guard' will be very long now, though."

CHAPTER XII

*On those poor frail sisters who've fallen low,
And who suffer and die through the sins of men —
More sinned against, than sinning, I trow —
Shew Thy Mercy — Thy Pity — Lord Christ, Amen.*

COURT OF COMMON PLEAS

WEARILY, and with a throbbing pain in his torn ear, Ellis resumed his vigil. An hour slowly passed. Two hours. Suddenly a restless movement from the bed aroused him from the dreamy lethargy into which he had sunk, and he gazed into the wide-open, bewildered eyes of the awakened girl that were regarding him wonderingly through their long lashes.

"How did I come here?" she articulated painfully.

"I carried you in," he said. "You've been in here for nearly three hours now."

Her lips moved soundlessly, and she remained with puckered forehead, as if striving to collect her thoughts.

"Then who were those other men?" she said in a hoarse whisper.

"Well, one was the postmaster, and there was the man that owns the hotel. The other man was the doctor. It was he who fixed you up."

Then, for the first time, she seemed to notice his bandaged head. With a little cry, she struggled feebly to raise herself, eyeing him fearfully the while.

"Where's Harry?" she gasped tensely. "You've been hurt, like me. Did you an' him get shootin' at each other again? Oh, tell me. Where is he?"

He strove to soothe her and allay her agitation, but without avail.

"Please! oh, please, Policeman!" she sobbed. "Don't arrest him. Let him go! He didn't *mean* to hurt me."

Her continued piteous pleading moved him greatly. Puzzled at this attitude towards the man who had ruined and maltreated her, Ellis inquired gently:

"Why?"

The great imploring dark eyes became like two twin stars, seeming to search his very soul, as a wave of ineffable forgiving pity and devotion glorified the face of the dying girl.

"Because — I — I —" she faltered.

The simplicity of her implied admission struck him dumb with surprise for a moment, and he stared at her in stupefied amazement.

"What?" he almost shouted. "You still love that chap after — after —"

Speech failed him and he could only continue to look at her in awed wonder.

Hard as they may find it to observe other precepts of the Great Master, this one, at least, most women have practised easily and naturally for over nineteen hundred years — "Forgive, until seventy times seven."

The acts of some of these — how they warred with their husbands and paramours and were

worsted; how they provoked the presiding magistrate and stultified the attesting policeman by obstinately ignoring their injuries written legibly in red, and black, and blue; how they interceded with many sobs for the aggressor — are they not written in the book of the chronicles of every police court in the world?

This propensity leads them into scrapes, it is true, for our world in its wisdom will always take advantage of such weaknesses. Perhaps the next will make them some amends.

The bright, fever-lit eyes never left Benton's face, and two tears rolled down her sunken cheeks as she nodded silently in answer to his incredulous query. Such an expression, indeed, might the Covenanters' widow have worn, as she looked into the ruthless countenance of Graham of Claverhouse and begged for the life of her only son. And such it is, also, that makes Guido's famous picture of Beatrice Cenci one of the saddest paintings on earth.

That look was almost more than the Sergeant could endure, and he hastily turned his head away to hide the hot, blinding tears that sprang to his eyes. There seemed something very terrible, just then, in the pathetic working of his stern face, as the strong man strove to hide his emotion.

"Diamonds and pearls," he whispered brokenly to himself; "diamonds and pearls."

And *this* — love such as *this*, had the dead man gained, then spurned brutally from him, and cast away.

The Soul — to the last, could still triumph over the poor broken Body, and *Love* — glorious, all-

forgiving Love — arise, victorious and conquering; through life — through death — aye — beyond the grave itself — to the very Resurrection Morn.

The sands of the poor sufferer's existence were running out fast now. Benton shuddered when he thought of the horror that would surely come into those shining, steadfast eyes if she were told whose blood was upon his hands. Why disturb the brief space that was allotted to her by revealing the awful truth? It would be a crime, he reflected. He lied, bravely and whole-heartedly.

"No," he said, "I haven't arrested him, my girl. I was chasin' after him, an' scratched one of my ears pretty bad climbin' through that barbed-wire fence alongside the track. A way-freight goin' East pulled through just about five minutes after, an' I guess he must have made his get-away on that."

She drank in his words with an eagerness that tortured his conscience sorely, but a quick, joyful light dawned on her face as his reward, and she sank back on the pillows again with a little weary, gratified sigh of relief. The strain had been too much for her, however, and she began to choke pitifully, as a fresh gush of blood bubbled up from her lips and stained her white breast. He slipped an arm under her head and, tenderly as a woman might have done, he soothed and ministered to her paroxysm.

For some few minutes she lay in a sort of stupor, and he watched her anxiously, undecided whether or not to awaken Musgrave; but presently she revived a little and her breathing became easier. The flow of blood from her mouth had abated and, as she

looked up and saw him supporting her, the pale lips relaxed into a faint semblance of their old roguish smile; when her face and bosom had been gently sponged, and she had drunk a glass of water, she spoke — almost in a whisper, but quite calmly and clearly:

“ You ca-can’t — arrest me — now! ”

The unutterable pathos of her pitiful little jest nearly broke him down then but, with a struggle, he raised his eyes and, with a twisted mouth, smiled valiantly back at her.

“ What did — that — doctor — say? ” she asked slowly. “ Does he — think — I’ll — die? I feel so — very — weak — and — tired . . . and my — chest — hurts me — terrible. . . . I think I — must be — dying. . . . Am I? . . . Look — at me — Policeman! . . . tell me. . . . Did he — say — I’m not — afraid. . . . ”

“ Elsie, girl,” he said unsteadily. “ Elsie, you’re — ” He stopped and, choking a little, reached out a slightly shaking hand to smooth back the dark curly hair from her white forehead. “ You’re going home, girl — you’re going home! ”

She gazed at him searchingly for a few seconds, then turned her head away listlessly, with a sharp intake of her breath. There was a long silence which was broken by Ellis.

“ Elsie Baxter *is* your name, all right, isn’t it? ” he asked gently.

She nodded, watching his face closely meanwhile.

“ How old are you? ”

“ Twenty-two,” she whispered.

“ What nationality? ”

"American."

"What part of the States do you come from, my girl?" he continued. "Where are your parents — if you have any — or your friends?"

But his inquiries failed to elicit any response, and all he got was the same passive look of mute entreaty which she had exhibited to all his queries on the occasion of their first meeting.

"Come," he whispered coaxingly. "Why won't you tell me? You ought to."

She sighed as if she were exhausted. "What's the — use?" she murmured. "My real mother — is — dead — an' — an' — my father — an' my step-mother — were unkind — to me — so I ran — away." . . .

She met his perplexed look with a faint, weary smile, and cuddled his hand beseechingly. "That's all," she said. "There. . . . I can't — tell you any — more — now. . . . Best — thing — if they never — hear. . . . I'm — going soon — where — I don't — know." She ceased, panting for breath.

He desisted then, for the doctor's final injunctions came to his remembrance with a pang of regret. He had encouraged her to talk *too* much already.

Aye — what *was* the use, he reflected. There was a world of meaning in her answer — too great to be misunderstood. Time, it is true, had wrought curious changes in his wandering life and ways, and both memory and conscience had, to a certain extent, become oblivious to many things; but, in the former faculty, assuredly one period in his history was not included. With a bitter hatred which not even the lapse of over twenty years could quench, he recalled

only too well, the pale, sneering face of the virago who had usurped the place of his own gentle mother, and whose animosity had eventually been the means of driving *him* from home, also.

"Yes," he mused. This poor dying waif and he probably had much in common.

The girl lay quiet for a long while, and a cheap American alarm clock ticked sharply in the stillness. Presently she turned her face to him again and regarded him earnestly.

"Will — you please — say a — prayer?" she articulated painfully. And, as he hesitated and looked at her in dumb misery: "Won't you? . . . even — even — for — such as me?"

A terrible revulsion of feeling shook his strong frame. Who was he, that he should dare to presume to pray for the dying? Fallen sinner though she might be — what was *he*? . . . And a vision of his own reckless and irresponsible past seemed to rise up before him accusingly.

"Please," the weak voice pleaded.

With bowed head and bursting heart he falteringly repeated the only prayer that he remembered — "The Lord's" — and, with its "Amen," a solemn, awesome quiet descended upon the little room.

And then — the end came very quickly. She turned her head and looked at him kindly. Her eyes were alight with a great, dreamy happiness, and in their depths he beheld the radiant glory that, passing all human understanding, heralds the near approach of death.

"Kiss me," she whispered faintly.

All his manhood sorely shaken, he stooped to be-

stow the caress. Only once in that last quiet minute of life — for death-struggle there was none — the white lips moved; and the Sergeant, bending down his ear, caught what may have been an appeal to the Father's mercy, but Ellis always believed it was a man's name.

She sighed once or twice wearily, gasped a little and, leaning her head back with a slight shiver, the poor girl's spirit went forth into the Night.

For a long time Benton never stirred. A sense of utter desolation, he knew not why, seemed to gather all around him. Inheriting from his mother a strongly impressionable nature, he was always chivalrously predisposed towards women and, somehow, complete stranger to him though the unfortunate waif was, the inexpressible pathos of her lonely, tragic death stirred all his being with a great, compassionate pity.

Suddenly he broke down and burst out sobbing, with the deep, convulsive emotion terrible to witness in a strong man; then, throwing his arms about the dead girl, he fell to his knees and, gazing imploringly into her quiet face, held her tightly, as if that firm clasp would hold her back one step on the road along which the messengers of God had beckoned her.

Would those with whom he was a byword for hard sternness of character have known him *then*?

The light of the lamp sank lower, flickered a little, and was gone. Worn out, mentally and bodily, the bowed head of the tired, kneeling watcher gradually drooped forward until it rested upon the bosom of

188 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

the motionless form. The still face had settled into the serene, peaceful grandeur of the death-calm. Beautiful she had been in life, aye, but never so beautiful as now.

Then, to the exhausted, sleeping man, there came a wondrous dream, and in it, behold! she appeared unto him again in all the glory of her youth, innocence, and beauty, clad in white and glistening raiment, with her arms outstretched to him from afar on High.

And, in her great, dark eyes, he seemed to see shining the love and pity of Mary Magdalene — *she* whom He denied not, but said: “Her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the *same* loveth little.”

CHAPTER XIII

*So — peacefully, slept the un-shrouded dead,
Beyond caring whether they stoned or kissed her;
Till a Ministering Angel came instead,
In the guise of a Salvation Army Sister.*
POOR "SKAGWAY KATE"

BRIGHTLY, ah, so brightly, the rays of the early morning sun flooded that sad room with their golden radiance, lighting up with a veritable halo of glory the still, peaceful face of *one* for whom the weary troubles and pain of this world had ceased.

The door opened softly and Musgrave, standing in its aperture, surveyed a scene that awed and shook even *his* cynical nature to its very depths. For some minutes he remained with bowed head, perfectly motionless, a picture of silent sympathy then, tip-toeing noiselessly forward, he shook the still sleeping Benton gently, and a haggard, drawn face was slowly upturned to his.

"Come, old man," he said quietly. "Rouse yourself. You can do no more good here now."

And, stiff and cold, the Sergeant arose and followed him out like a child.

Wearily he returned to the detachment and, with mechanical instinct, tidied up the place. Then, duly attending scrupulously to his personal toilet, he went

down to the hotel, where he forced himself to swallow a few mouthfuls of food and a cup of coffee. Later he repaired to the room of Musgrave's patient and, after subjecting that unfortunate individual to a somewhat lengthy examination, he formally placed him under arrest. These duties despatched, he departed with a heavy heart to the station to await the incoming west-bound train, which was over an hour late.

Gradually, under the influence of his surroundings and the fresh morning air, mind and body, from constant habit, returned, naturally, to their normal state of soldierly alertness. To all outward appearance he became once more the composed, practical guardian of the Law, resourceful and ready for any duty that claimed him. Presently he was joined by the station agent, who greeted him with a sort of miserable heartiness.

"Well, Sergeant," he began, "and how are we this morning? Some doings last night, eh? What about that ear of yours? You look as if you'd sure come through a rough house, with that bandage on. What's the other feller look like?"

Ellis did not answer for a moment, but a faint grin overspread his haggard face as he regarded the other's tell-tale countenance attentively.

"*We!*" he echoed, with quiet derision. "I'm afraid *we* doesn't feel very well this nice mornin', Carey. Ear stings like the devil. As for the other fellow — you know what *he* looks like, all right. You look as if you were just doin' a 'walk-march' to your *own* funeral. You'd better keep a flask on your hip for emergencies, as you an' me'll

be the star witnesses when this inquest comes off. I'm expectin' the coroner an' one of our inspectors on this train."

"Oh, I don't think I'll fall off the perch just yet," said the agent, with a sheepish smile. "I've got the other key off Petersen," he continued significantly. "One or two of the curious ones came nosing around, but I warned 'em off the course, quick. Hello! here she comes. Well, I'll see you later, Sergeant." And he hurried away about his duties.

Inspector Purvis, a dark, heavy-set, middle-aged man, wearing the South African and Riel Rebellion campaign ribbons, acknowledged Benton's salute punctiliously and, turning, introduced his companion.

"This is Dr. Sampson, the coroner, Sergeant Benton," he said.

And Ellis shook hands with a tall, gray-mustached, pleasant-faced man, whom he knew very well by sight. The latter glanced sharply at the policeman's bandaged head.

"Looks as if you'd been in the wars, Sergeant," he said. "What's happened you?"

Ellis drew them on one side and briefly related his story, to which they listened with lively interest.

"Well, well," said the Inspector at its conclusion. "We'll wait till this train pulls out, and let these people get away, and then we'll go on down to this section hut and view this body."

Ten minutes later they stood in front of the shed, and Ellis unlocked the door and flung it open. An angry buzz greeted them, as their presence disturbed a hideous swarm of blue-bottle flies. Sharp exclamations of loathing and disgust escaped the two

newcomers who, after gazing for a few seconds at the *thing* that had once been a man, proceeded to note all details carefully, with the callous precision of men hardened to such sights.

Once the Inspector's glance traveled curiously, from the shattered head of the corpse, to the stern, bandaged face of the man beside him, who had caused this terrible transformation.

"Some shootin'!" he observed, in a low voice, to the coroner.

It seemed to be rather a doubtful compliment, though, under the circumstances, so the latter only nodded nonchalantly, and refrained from comment himself.

"There's absolutely no doubt about this being Shapiro, the man that's wanted, sir," said Ellis. "I saw the other man, Wilks, who's lying sick up at the hotel, this morning. He confirms this man's identity, and admits everything. I'll take you up to see him later."

Presently the coroner straightened himself up.

"All right!" he said. "I guess I'm through here, if you are, Inspector. Let's go and view the other body at the house the Sergeant speaks of."

They turned to go, and Ellis locked the door again.

"Oh, Benton!" said the Inspector, in a low tone, beckoning him aside. "Just a minute."

With a slightly uncomfortable presentiment of what was coming, the former obeyed.

There was a moment's silence, while the Inspector eyed him keenly, but not unkindly.

"I understand this isn't the first man you've shot

and killed in the execution of your duty, Sergeant, since you've been in this Division," he said.

Ellis bowed his head in assent.

"Well, in that case," continued the Inspector briskly, "your previous experience has no doubt enlightened you, then, in regard to the customary procedure in such cases. You are, of course, aware that the finding of a coroner's jury, while *it* may acquit you of all blame in causing a person's death, doesn't necessarily preclude any subsequent inquiry that the *Crown* may see fit to institute later, although it would naturally carry considerable weight with it in such an eventuality." . . .

He paused for a moment, and then went on in the slightly sententious tones of one who knows he has an unpleasant duty to perform:

"I've the O.C.'s orders to place you under 'open' arrest, and take you back to the Post with me. There will be a formal charge laid against you, and you will have to face an inquiry in regard to this man's death. Of course, I shall remain here until these inquests, etc., are over. That is all, Sergeant. Now we'll go on down to this other place."

With a strange, indefinable feeling of reluctance, he conducted them thither. Awed, and filled with compassion at what they beheld, they halted irresolutely, a moment, on the threshold, and bared their heads reverently in the presence of the dead. Then, entering the chamber, they made a brief examination which, to Benton, standing idly there in his dumb misery, seemed almost in the light of a sacrilege.

A whispered colloquy ensued between them for a few minutes, and then they gently withdrew and

closed the door, Ellis following them out to receive his instructions.

"Inspector," began the coroner, "I would have liked, if possible, to have had this double inquest held here; but there's not enough room, I'm afraid. Could you —"

Ellis, with ready tact, broke in quietly: "I think I can arrange that, all right, doctor. I know the man who rents this cottage next door. He's the day operator at the station. His wife's away just now, so he's staying with Mr. Carey, the station agent. There wouldn't be any difficulty about obtaining the use of *his* premises to hold the inquiry in, and I could have the other body removed down here, so as to utilize this place as the morgue."

"Ah, very well," said the coroner, with evident relief; "that will be entirely satisfactory. There's just one other thing I would like you to see to, Sergeant. Kindly get some woman to attend to the necessary arrangements in this last case — lay her out decently, and so on — you understand?"

"And afterwards," supplemented the Inspector, "of course give Dr. Sampson all the assistance you can in empanelling a jury. Why, hello, doctor!" he exclaimed, turning to Musgrave, who had just joined them. "*You* seem to have been getting yourself mixed up in stirring events around here, according to what Sergeant Benton tells me. Whatever brings *you* so far away from home? I guess we'll need your evidence at these inquests."

The three men chatted awhile, then presently, the coroner and the Inspector departed for the hotel, leaving Musgrave and Benton together.

An indefinable constraint seemed to have fallen upon them, for the gloomy memory of the past night was still vivid in their minds and oppressed them greatly. The doctor was the first to break the silence.

"By gum!" he said; "I'd clean forgotten about your ear, Ellis. My bag's still here. Let's dress it again for you. Come inside again for a bit."

With deft hands he soon performed the operation and Benton, studiously avoiding the elder man's eyes, thanked him and, with a slightly overdone yawn, prepared to leave and carry out the orders that he had previously received. Throughout Musgrave had talked incessantly on irrelevant subjects. It seemed as if he were maundering with design, beating about the bush of some communication he feared to make, and just talking against time.

"Well! have you seen that patient of mine up at the hotel yet?" he inquired.

The Sergeant, with a curious, apprehensive glance at the closed bedroom door, beckoned the other outside. As if, almost, he feared that the dead might hear.

"Yes," he said. "Saw him when I went up for breakfast. He's the man, all right — Herbert Wilks — admits everything. Seemed glad to get it off his chest. Told me the whole business. Sounds just like a dime novel yarn. Well, truth's stranger than fiction, so they say. Appears he's been a dissipated young beggar, and he got fired from the Trust Company for inattention to his work. The very day he got let out he happened to pick up a paper in the manager's private office, which turned out

to be nothing more or less than the combination of the safe. Suppose the manager — or whoever *had* the combination — was scared to commit it to memory alone. Well, being, as I said before, a dissipated young scamp, he'd somehow got mixed up with this Shapiro chap in one or two dirty deals — women, I guess — an' what not. Of course, he was pretty sore about gettin' the push — went on a bust that night, an' while he was 'lit' told Shapiro all about this paper he'd found. You just bet Mister 'Harry the Mack' wasn't goin' to let a chance like that go by, an' soon got Wilks goin' . . . telling him what a good opportunity it was to get back at them, an' all that. Well, they fixed everything up for two nights after, and brought in Lipinski along with them. Shapiro'd got a set of burglar's tools and soon effected an entrance. He an' Wilks crawled in, leaving Lipinski as a 'look-out.' Wilks messed with the combination for a bit an' tried to open her up, but couldn't work it. Might have been an old one that'd been changed two or three times since the scale'd been written on this paper. Anyway, there seemed nothing doin' an' 'Harry,' being a yegg, got tired, an' suggested blowin' it. He went out to get the 'soup' . . . from a pal of his who lived a short distance away, leaving Wilks still there. While he was waiting, our friend had *another* go at it, an' *this* time managed, somehow, to turn the trick.

"He cleaned up everything, as *he* thought, and beat it in a hurry, leaving the safe open. Told Lipinski he'd be back in a minute — an' skinned out. 'Honor among thieves' — what? Well, naturally, the first idea that came into his head was to

go back to his home town — Hamilton — and swank around there for a bit with this money, thinking, of course, though, that suspicion might fall on him right away, bein' fired two days before, and the safe, not blown, but opened by the combination, he was cute enough not to attempt to get aboard the East-bound *there*. Mr. Man gets some crooked pal of his — a chauffeur — to drive him in his automobile as far as Garstang. He laid up there till the ten-fifteen came along next morning. Then he got a bloomin' fright. He was sitting in the first-class coach, all tickled up the back at makin' his get-away so easy when, who should come an' plank himself down on the seat alongside him but Mister '*Harry the Mack*.' This chauffeur pal of his had double-crossed him after he'd driven back — told Shapiro everything who, you bet, wasn't goin' to get left like that.

"All this is, of course, what Harry told him. He'd managed to get on the train all right, without bein' spotted — taking —" He lowered his voice, and indicated the drawn blinds with a significant gesture — "with him. Partly to divert suspicion, I suppose . . . look like respectable couple — man an' wife. Well, naturally, Harry talked pretty ugly . . . what he'd do to him, an' all that, if he didn't whack up; but Wilks wouldn't 'come across' — kept bluffin' that he'd divvy up later on, an' so on — knowing that he was safe enough as long as he was amongst a crowd of people. Of course Harry never breathed a word about shootin' the night-watchman. The first intimation Wilks had about *that* was in a paper at the hotel, here. It ap-

198 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

pears about ten minutes after he'd vamoosed with the money Harry came back with the 'soup,' to do the blowin' act. Lipinski told him that Wilks would be back in a few minutes, so they waited a bit. As he showed no signs of returning, they decided to go ahead without him — Lipinski goin' in with Harry this time, to give him a hand. It didn't take 'em long to see what'd happened, you bet. Everything all strewn around and turned upside down. They found a hundred an' fifty in a small drawer I guess he'd overlooked in his hurry an', according to Lipinski's statement, they'd just split this up when the poor, bloomin' watchman happened along an' Shapiro fixed him. Then they bolted an' the patrolman on the beat shot at them an' one skinned one way an' one the other. Lipinski didn't see Harry again after that — beat it on his own to Seattle later, an' got nailed.

"Well, it seems they kept up this chewin' the rag an' watching each other till the train got down as far as here. It was gettin' dark, then. Harry'd got a bottle of whiskey in his grip when he'd come on the train. He started in to get primed up on this, an' Wilks got scared, for Harry began to raise his voice an' look at him pretty nasty, with his hand in his hip-pocket. They managed to kick up such a row between 'em that the con' came along — gave 'em a callin' down an' threatened to chuck 'em off the train if they didn't shut up. Harry started to give the con' a whole lot of lip, an' while these two were squabblin' together, Mister Wilks slipped off — *here* — just as the train was on the move.

"Of course Harry, as soon as he missed him,

promptly got off at the next stop — Glenmore — fifteen miles east of here — an' caught the West-bound back again in the morning. Went straight to the hotel an' soon located his man. Didn't speak to him, though. Didn't register at the place, either — but that may have been because of the expense — hadn't any too much 'dough' left, an' p'r'aps figured he'd most likely have a long wait. He rented this furnished cottage instead, for a few days. It belongs to a chap named George Ricks, over at Beaver Dam. He comes into town an' lives in it himself all the winter, but leaves it in charge of some chap here to rent to anybody who comes along during the summer. I guess Harry felt pretty safe, knowing that Wilks wasn't exactly in the position to give him away. There's absolutely no doubt what his intention was —"

The Sergeant paused a moment and eyed his listener grimly. The latter, with an equally grim comprehensive gesture, nodded silently.

"Well," he went on, "here they camped, watchin' each other's every little movement. Shapiro never got much of a show to do anything, though, for Wilks took darned good care to keep inside the hotel most of the time. He admits he was scared to death, especially after reading about Harry shootin' the watchman. Just dawdled around — couldn't make up his mind *what* to do, knowing that he couldn't shake Harry a *second* time. He was feeling pretty sick, too. . . . I guess this thing's been comin' on him some time, hasn't it, Charley?"

The doctor, nodding again, replied: "Yes, about a month, most probably."

"An' that's how the case stands," concluded Ellis wearily. "If you hadn't gone into his room that time when you did, Harry'd most likely put the kibosh on him right there. Choked him, p'r'aps. I got the money off him, O. K. About a hundred short — what he'd paid for his ticket through to Hamilton, a bribe to that chauffeur, Kelly, his hotel bill here, an' odds an' ends. The New Axminster men'll get their hooks on that chauffeur quick, I'll bet, when the O.C. forwards them my crime report. Don't know whether they'll be able to make a charge stick or not — may do. I turned the money into the bank for safe keeping. Inspector Purvis'll take it down with him when we go back to the Post."

There was a long pause. "Well, what'll happen to this fellow now?" inquired Musgrave.

"Guess Churchill'll have to keep an eye on him," said Ellis indifferently. "Take him in to the Post soon as he's able to travel. He'll be held there till a New Axminster man comes for him. Feel sorry, in a way, for the poor sick devil, but that's all that can be done with *him*, now. Well, I must be getting — lots o' work to do. See you later, Charley."

The elder man laid a detaining hand on the Sergeant's shoulder, and his voice shook ever so little as he said slowly:

"Wait a bit. There's something I want to tell you before you go." He swallowed and hesitated slightly in his agitation. "It's about that — that — that poor girl," he continued, in strained, unnatural tones. "Ellis, old man, you don't know how sorry I am that I sneered at you last night. . . . About being a moral reformer, and all that. . . . I

hardly meant it at the time. And I've been feeling pretty bad since — since —"

His voice broke, and he left the sentence unfinished. This was a great concession from Musgrave, and his hearer thought so, as he grasped the other's arm with a sympathetic pressure.

"Charley," he said gently, "Charley. . . . Don't think of that again. . . . See here; look! I don't take you in earnest, every time. You're the best friend I've got . . . an' the very first man I'd think of comin' to, if I was in trouble. Maybe you don't know it, but I tell you that same sarcastic tongue o' yours has cured me of lots o' dam'-fool notions — time an' again."

They remained silent awhile, after this, then Musgrave went on, in a stronger voice:

"This is what I wanted to say. Seems very apparent, they — this — unfortunate couple, have little or no money —"

The Sergeant nodded, and cleared his throat. "Very little," he said. "Man's got a few dollars left — seven-fifty, or something like that."

"Well, now; look!" said the doctor. "These two will have a decent burial in the cemetery here, at my expense. It's my wish." And, as Ellis raised a protesting hand, "No, no, my boy — let be! *You're* not immaculate, God knows, but, by the Lord Harry! you're a better man than I am, and I respect you for many things. . . . 'As ye sow, so shall ye reap.' . . . It's thirty years since I heard that text; I forgot it the same day, and never thought of it again till now. There may be truth in it. I say, for the peace of my soul, let me do this thing; and

little though it is — may the Recording Angel — if there is one — remember it as something in my favor when my time comes.”

Ellis never forgot those words, nor the weary, bitter, hopeless look that accompanied them; and, long years afterwards, their remembrance rushed back to his mind with vivid distinctness, as he held poor Musgrave's dying head.

Drearily he wended his way up the main street, his mind preoccupied with the problem of fulfilling the coroner's final request. He knew comparatively few of the male — let alone, the female, community, of the little town and, somehow, he instinctively shrank at the thought of having to approach strange women anent such a delicate duty. In his perplexity he went to Carey, and besought the latter's advice.

The agent mused a space. “Let's see,” he said. “There's Mrs. Steele — she's head of the Women's Church Guild here, and there's Mrs. Parsons, and Mrs. Macleod. You go and see them. They ought to be able to help you out. I'll tell you where they live.”

With a vague feeling of uneasiness, Ellis departed, and presently found himself at Mrs. Steele's abode. A gray-haired, elderly woman, with a high-featured, severe face, answered his summons and, with some trepidation, he broached the subject of his visit. She listened impatiently, her hard eyes narrowing and her thin lips compressing themselves into a straight line.

“No!” she snapped coldly, as he ended. “I *don't* — an' what's more . . . I wouldn't think of

asking — or expecting — any decent woman to go getting herself mixed up in such a scandalous business as this."

And she began to slowly thrust the door to. "Such shockin' goin's on in a decent, God-fearing neighborhood!" she shrilled. "Wicked hussies walkin' the street, an' — an' men being shot — an' all, an' all. . . . God help the town that has to depend on the likes of you policemen to keep such bad characters away!"

The virulence with which she uttered this last somewhat unjust, remark, stung him sharply.

"Aye, madam," he echoed bitterly. "An' God help all poor, unfortunate souls that are dependent upon the likes of you for Christian mercy, too!"

But his words only greeted empty air, for the door was slammed violently to in his face.

Feeling sick at heart, he wandered away, only meeting with more or less indifference at the other addresses that Carey had given him. By this time a strange nervousness, entirely foreign to his nature, began to assail him. Men he understood and could deal with. But women — ah, that was a very different matter.

He was just on the point of abandoning his quest in despair when he beheld a woman coming out of a store opposite to where he stood. The light of a great relief immediately lit up his troubled eyes for, in the plain, homely, blue-serge uniform that she wore, with its red-barred bonnet, he recognized at a glance the all-familiar badge of the Salvation Army — that long-suffering and too frequently disparaged organization which, nevertheless, spreads

its gospel of humility and help to the ends of the earth; whose followers, whilst always remaining nobly indifferent to the shafts of misguided ridicule leveled against them from time to time by members of many far less charitable sects, never shrink from entering the lowly dwellings of the poorest of the poor — aye — and the foulest dens of iniquity — in the *practical* fulfilment of their creed of genuine Christian mercy and succor.

Ellis looked eagerly at the slight figure for a moment. Why not try her? he reflected. Surely *she* wouldn't turn him down, like the rest? Didn't the Salvationists always hold a service for the prisoners in the guardroom every Sunday morning? And didn't they help out all the poor devils who were down and out when their sentences were expired — giving them shelter, food, and clothes, and finding them jobs? Yes, he would ask *her*!

He crossed over and, with a few quick strides, overtook the little woman, who stopped at his salutation and turned a worn, patient face to his, regarding him with astonishment meanwhile, out of a pair of kindly brown eyes.

Why did he stammer and hesitate like that? she wondered. Surely he could not be afraid of *her*? For the Sergeant's voice and manner betrayed a curious timidity just then, that was strangely out of keeping with his bronzed, hard-bitten face and athletic figure. His recent experiences had rendered him decidedly nervous in approaching women. She listened to his request with passive interest, and nodded her acquiescence, gazing intently, all the time, at his bandaged head.

"I'm afraid you must have got hurt bad," she said sympathetically. "It was all in this morning's paper, an' everybody's full of it. I came up on the early train to nurse a sick woman here. I remember seeing you once before, a long time ago, at the Barracks. I was in the Female Gaol, talking to Mrs. Stratford, the matron, an' you came over from the guardroom."

"Would to God you'd been here last night!" he blurted out passionately.

"Aye, would to God I had!" she echoed, with a wistful sadness. "Give me the key, then, Sergeant. I'll go right on down there now."

Silently he handed it over, and tried to thank her, but somehow — the words would not come. He only looked at her, with a dumb gratitude showing in his tired eyes, swallowed a little, and turned quickly away.

CHAPTER XIV

*"Mother and daughter, father and son,
Come to my solitude one by one;
But come they stranger, or come they kin,
I gather — gather — I gather them in."*

THE OLD SEXTON

TWO days later the little funeral cortège slowly wound its way up to the diminutive cemetery, situated on a rising plateau at the back of the little town.

It was a still, fine afternoon, and the bright sunshine flooded everything around that peaceful spot with its sleepy, golden haze. Far away in the distance arose the purple peaks of the Rockies, white-capped with their eternal snows against the pure, turquoise-blue sky. It was a day to gladden the hearts of all living creatures, but somehow its tranquillity awoke no response in the breasts of the two men who followed the dead to their last resting place.

Arriving at the grave-side they reverently bared their heads, and the clergyman, a kindly, earnest-faced young man with a deep, resonant voice, began the service.

Ellis felt unaccountably oppressed with many conflicting emotions. Though never a downright unbeliever, religion was to him more or less of a sealed book, and the reckless, irresponsible wandering life

that had been his since boyhood had not been conducive to much serious thought on that sacred subject. The solemn, beautiful, tremendous words that stand at the head of the burial service, with their glorious, all-powerful promise of Eternal Life affected him strangely now, with their awe-inspiring significance.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life," saith the Lord: "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

Often — ah, how often — with the callous indifference bred of active service and its cruel, sordid realities, had he listened to them before, out there on the far-away South African veldt, blaspheming, as like as not, under his breath at the heat, and the dust, and the maddening flies as, "Resting upon Arms Reversed," he stood beside the freshly dug grave of some dead comrade.

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away."

And the vision of his dream rose up in his brooding mind once more; and again he seemed to behold that poor girl before him, arisen from the dead, and the glory in her eyes as, with bowed head and outstretched arms like the Angel of Pity, she gazed sweetly, but sadly, down upon him from amidst that great, shining, billowy cloud of light.

And then — his brain sank into a deep oblivion of dreamy, chaotic thought, through which the curate's sonorous intonation, sounding far off and indistinct, penetrated at intervals.

"We therefore commit her body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

208 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

At the well-remembered words mechanically, from long practise, he stooped and cast a handful of earth into the grave. And, the dull thud of its fall upon her coffin, was on his very heart.

The service ended, but still the scarlet-coated figure remained there motionless, with bowed head, as of one in a dream. He was aroused from his reverie by Musgrave touching him on the arm.

"Come, old man!" said the doctor gently; "it's all over now; let's go. Are you going to wait for the — other?" . . .

"Yes," responded Ellis in a strained, unnatural voice, without raising his eyes.

Drearily, without another word being uttered on either side the whole way back, they returned to the detachment and, sitting down in the little office, filled their pipes and smoked moodily awhile, amidst an embarrassing silence, which was finally broken by Musgrave.

"Well, Ellis, old man," he said quietly, "seems we've come through rather a sad passage."

Benton raised his troubled eyes and, for the first time that day, looked the other squarely in the face, with a certain sense of relief as he did so.

"Yes," he answered listlessly, "I know I have. Charley," he continued, "I don't know exactly why it is, but that girl's death's shaken me up rather bad . . . kid was an utter stranger to me, but somehow — somehow — it seems as if I'd known her always. Must have been her eyes." His voice shook a little, and trailed off into a murmur. "Yes . . .

they were very like poor Eileen Regan's — way back there in Jo'burg — very like hers, weren't they? "

He paused, and the doctor nodded sympathetically. Before the war he had known the Sergeant's dead love well — had attended her in her last illness. There was a long silence.

"Don't worry, Ellis," said Musgrave softly. "She's in a better place now, I think, for she was more sinned against than sinning, poor girl."

Benton got up and, leaning out of the open window, looked dreamily away over the sun-scorched prairie.

"Aye," he muttered slowly, half to himself; "I don't think — I know. I saw the look on her face the night she died . . . an' I saw her again — afterwards. That should stop me from worrying. See here; look, Charley," he went on, in a steadier voice, turning to his companion: "You must have seen many deaths in your time — lots more than I have, I guess . . . an' God knows I've seen enough, one way an' another. I tell you — people in their last stages see something that *we* can't. It's beyond *our* ken — but it's there. Probably you as a doctor, with all your scientific medical theories, analyze it differently, but you know what I mean, for all that."

Musgrave did not answer at once, but smoked thoughtfully on for a space.

"Yes," he agreed, with a curious, dry intonation in his voice, "I know what you mean, all right. No doubt they *do* possess some strange prescience . . . but I don't think we'll start a discussion on that, old man. Circumstances have reduced both of us to a

certain frame of mind just now, wherein we might be persuaded into believing anything."

Ellis cogitated awhile over this last utterance.

"M'm — yes," he admitted reluctantly. "Only temporarily at that, too. Begad! . . . I'm the one that knows it. . . . Guess I'm the most impulsive, changeable beggar that ever was. . . . Always have been more or less of an impressionable fool — where women are concerned, anyway. S'pose it's my nature. Here are we two — we've both had our troubles at various periods of our sinful lives. Some were of our own making — some were not. Mind! I'm not meanin' this lightly, remember . . . far from it at such a time as this . . . but just the plain, absolute facts — coming from a man who knows himself too well to trust his passing emotions." He struck a match and lit his pipe again, continuing with some irritation in his voice. "All that bunkum that religious extremists and temperance cranks would have you believe . . . about sudden conversions an' all that. . . . Fellows *can* alter their ways a bit — chuck a brace, an' climb out of the pit they've dug for themselves, no doubt. But it's a *gradual* process, an' doesn't come quick by any means, like these fanatics try to make out. There's one of 'em, in particular, who makes a specialty of writing — what he, in his limited knowledge of actual facts — conceives to be true Western yarns. Most of 'em, I guess, pass as such with the general public who read 'em. Oh, he's great on this conversion business. One was a fool book about *our* Force, I remember, where he makes the bucks go pallin' around arm in arm with their superior officers — doin' the 'Percy,

old chap,' stunt, 'When we were at college together, you know!' Sounds all hunkadory — like a happy family, an' all that but, unfortunately, it ain't true. Can't imagine it happening with any of the powers that be in *our* Division, anyway. Take 'Father,' for instance — what? Then, again — all that stuff — what 'Tork abaht Tompkins' our regimental teamster calls 'Igh falutin' Bull-Durham,' and 'Father' — 'Poppcock' that's written about the Force. An' oh — *always* in a bloomin' red serge, of course, no matter what dirty job they're on . . . never a stable-jacket — they don't wear such things. All the pictures you see of Mounted Policemen, too, chasin' cattle rustlers, arresting bootleggers, an' nitchies, in which we're depicted as such 'eroes' — red serge, again — so's the noble Mounted cop can be seen comin' a long ways off. That reminds me, though — I'll have to ride back to the Creek in one myself," he added ruefully. "My stable-jacket's ruined with all that blood on it."

He paused, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"No, *sir*," he continued emphatically. "*I* know what becomes of the large percentage of your sudden converts. Most of 'em land up as hopeless booze artists in the last stages of D.T. — or else go *completely* bug-house. Lord knows, we get all kinds of 'em in that guardroom at the Post. Many's the screechin', prayin' strait-jacketed nuisance I've had to escort up to Ponoka. After all's said an' done, the only philosophy a man can practise to make life worth living at all, is just to peg along quietly, doing the best he can under the circumstances in which he finds himself placed day by day. I know it is for a

212 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

Mounted man, anyway for, begad! he get's everybody else's bloomin' troubles dinned into his ears in addition to his own.

"As you said just now, we've both come through a sad passage. We have. But this feeling won't stay with us. We'll be genuinely an' sincerely sorry an' repentant for the time being, but by degrees we'll fall back into our old ways again. It may be smug, complacent reasoning, but it's a fact. Now, isn't that right, Charley?"

The elder man smiled wearily. "Guess you're pretty near it," he admitted. "Don't know whether you're able to put all *your* troubles behind you as effectively as you intimate. I know I can't lots of mine. There's some I can't forget — even after all these years. They're with me night and day. Remember me telling you . . . that day when we were up at Cecil Rhodes' tomb, 'way back there up in the Matoppos?"

He gazed at Benton anxiously, almost timidly. Ellis bowed his head in assent, but he could not find words to answer just then. For there was something in the haggard, deeply lined face of his old friend that forbade conventional condolence.

A long silence ensued, and presently Musgrave rose to go.

*"The Devil was sick —
The Devil a monk would be;"*

he quoted, with a wry, whimsical smile. "I guess I'll go on over to the hotel and see 'Wilks,' as you call him. He was much better this morning. Believe he'll pull through without an operation now.

Churchill should be able to take him down in three or four days' time if he keeps improving like this. By the way! Churchill's making a pretty long stay at the Post, isn't he?"

"Oh, I don't know," yawned the Sergeant. "P'r'aps he's not through with that case of his yet. It was right at the end of the docket. Maybe he's got mighty good reason for not hurrying back, too," he added ominously.

"I never noticed till the other day he'd got the South African ribbon up — whatever outfit was *he* in?" inquired the doctor.

"Search me," said Ellis contemptuously. "The 'Can I Venture,' 'Jam Wallahs,'—'Sacca Bona's Horse,' or some irresponsible bunch o' Bashi-Bazouks, I guess. I've never asked him. I think I told you before, Charley, there's five hundred dollars' reward for Wilks. If it comes through, so much the better for both of us. I'll see you sure get your fee an' expenses in full. In all fairness you're entitled to half of it, anyway, in consideration of the whisper you gave me in the beginning."

"Didn't think you fellows were allowed to accept rewards," said the doctor.

"Well, we're not, as a rule," Ellis admitted. "But now an' again they make exceptions when the crime has been committed outside our usual jurisdiction. Take that hold-up of the C.P.R. passenger train near Ducks in B.C. that time, by those three chaps — Bill Miner, Shorty Dunn, an' Lewis Colquhoun. Five of our men got rewarded for nailing *them*. Let's see! there was Wilson, Shoebottom, Peters, Stewart, an' Browning. They got thirteen

hundred an' fifty apiece for that job. But we never receive it direct. It has to come through the Commissioner. Generally it's turned into the Fine Fund at Headquarters, an' the grant is made from there."

"All right," said Musgrave indifferently, as he opened the door. "If it does come through — why, all well and good, though I'm sorry, in a way, for the poor devil."

With his hand on the knob, he turned, the ghost of a smile flitting across his strong intellectual face.

"Guess you weren't far out in your remarks just now," he said. "Seems the transformation's begun already. Afraid we've come down to Mother Earth again with a vengeance. Remember Sir Noel Paton's great picture — 'The Man with the Muck-rake,' Ellis? So long!"

"So long," the other answered mechanically, without turning his head.

And the door closed softly.

CHAPTER XV

*O Memory, ope thy mystic door!
O dream of youth, return!
'And let the lights that gleamed of yore
Beside this altar burn!*

GRAY

THE subtle irony conveyed in the doctor's last words had not been lost on their hearer.

"Aye! 'The Man with the Muckrake,'" he soliloquized. "That was just it. Also, it was characteristic of Charley that he should have interpreted the impression in such fashion, too.

It was Sunday, and the sound of the church bells tolling for evening service, interspersed with the merry voices of children in their play, fell unheeded on the ears of the man who, with mind sunk in far-away thought, still remained in the same attitude, with his arms resting on the window ledge, gazing out over the unbroken vista of rolling prairie.

That stern, bandaged face, framed in the open casement, its brooding eyes fixed, seemingly, on the beyond, with the whole setting bathed in the blood-red flame of the sunset's afterglow, might have impressed one as vividly suggestive of that striking example of the late Sir John Tenniel's art, in his depiction of that scene enacted in far-off Khar-toum twenty-three years before — of *one* — who,

wounded and desperate, gazed day by day from a window in the citadel out across the sun-scorched desert towards Metemmah, his despairing eyes forever vainly seeking that help which came not.

The evening shadows began to fall, but still Ellis remained in that deep reverie while, as if in a dream, visions of his past life rose up in his mind with strange reality.

As if it were only yesterday he recalled that last stormy scene which clinched his determination to leave home. The scornful, accusing face of his step-mother, and his father's angry, worried countenance, as he (Ellis) gazed steadily and defiantly back at the woman whose continual petty spite had contrived to make his life at home unbearable.

Both of them were still alive and well, old Major Carlton had mentioned in his last letter. No — they never spoke of him. He was an outcast from his family of his own accord. Yes, that might be, but never a prodigal, or a remittance man, despite his birth and early breeding.

No, he could never be classed with such as they, thank God. Ever since he had shaken the dust of England off his feet he had earned his living honestly with the toil of his brain and body, as a man amongst men. He had done nothing to shame his manhood, and his life was his own to live out as he saw fit; so, come what might, unless by their express behest, his people should never behold his face again, whether in life or death.

Then, tripping fast over one another, came flashes of the wild, free life on the range that had followed his emigration. That evening he arrived at the

Circle H — only a boy in his teens, hungry, foot-sore, and moneyless, after tramping all the way from Billings. The rough, morose face of "Big Jim Parsons," as he sneeringly asked him his nationality, and finally flung him a job, as a bone to a dog. That worthy's kindness to him afterwards, in recognition of his proven courage and adaptability, and the unspeakable language the foreman was wont to use in his clumsy attempts to gloss over any generous deed. Poor old Jim. *His* had been the kind of friendship that counts. Too bad that horse had killed him like it did, after all his years of riding. The fun they had when they blew into town after the round-ups. The trivial arguments that so often ended in death, and the blind, unquestioning sincerity with which they espoused their bosses' and friends' feuds over the sheep-grazing infringements and other grievances of cattle men. The smell of scorched hide and the bawling of cattle in the corrals on branding days. The riding and steer roping at Cheyenne and Red Butte on gala occasions. Aye, that was the life. Why hadn't he stuck to it instead of becoming by turns, prize-fighter, soldier and, finally, Mounted Policeman? getting, in the latter vocation, as he had previously remarked, a taste of everybody else's worries in addition to his own.

Then followed brief memories of his pugilistic career. That scrap on the open street in Butte that night, which had been the thin edge of the wedge of his subsequent entry into professional fighting, when he put away "Bull Blatzsky" for chasing that girl. The piteous appeal in her frightened, pretty

face as she sought his protection, and the contemptuous sarcasm of the formidable prize-fighter, telling him to "beat it back to th' farm." The tingling in his veins, and the exultation that he had felt surging through him as he beheld his opponent weakening, and the yelling plaudits of the crowd as he fought himself out of that last clinch and landed the final punch that ended matters. He had knocked out men enough since then, Lord knows, at one time and another, and perhaps might do the same for many more, but that hot, proud flush he would never feel again. That fight in which he had defeated Gus Ahrens at Madison Square Gardens in New York, and received a thousand dollars as his long end of the purse. The terrible month's spree that followed. And then — the low-down, insidious propositions that various promoters and managers kept putting up to him from time to time which, finally, decided him to forsake the ring. Yes, begad! the average standard of prize-fighting morality was rotten to the core. He could vouch for it from personal experience. It was a good job he'd quit it in time before the crooks got him; but, at any rate, he could always look back to those days with the clear conscience of one who had never "put anything over" on the public. Fought on the square at all times, and given the best that was in him for the spectators and those that had backed him. Whatever they might have said or thought, it surely was not flagging endurance or courage that caused his departure for South Africa.

And, with that reflection, the memory of his first glimpse of that later unquiet land came back to him,

and again he seemed to see the huge, black, up-flung wall of Table Mountain clean-cut against the blue-black, star-studded sky, and the twinkling lights of Capetown beneath its shadow, with the great, yellow African moon above all, as he beheld it from the deck of the *Braemar Castle* the night she made Table Bay.

What a curious old and new-world town Capetown was, with its civilized and uncivilized mixture of races, creeds, and dress that you could stand and watch jostling each other in front of the windows of those splendid up-to-date stores in Plein Street. English, Dutch, Portuguese, Hottentot, Malay, Zulu, Kaffir, Hindoo, and Chinese, with the ubiquitous Jew bidding fair to outnumber them all. What a pleasant, lazy time he had had, wandering around there before he went up-country. Out Greenpoint way to the sea's edge, where one could look clear across past the lighthouse to Simon's-Town, and Lion's Head Mountain. And those occasional trips to the outlying suburbs, Wynberg, Paarl, Woodstock, where all the magnates' luxurious bungalows were, lying half-hidden amidst huge, clustering masses of magnificent tropical foliage; and Rondebosch, where "Groot Schuur," the palatial home of Cecil Rhodes, the great Dictator of Cape Colony and Rhodesia, was situated.

He was dead now — that strong, skilful protagonist to whom Africa owed so much, and buried in accordance with his last wish — in a tomb cut out of the solid rock on the summit of the highest peak in the Matoppos, appropriately termed "The View of the World."

220 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

*It is his will that he look forth
Across the world he won —
The granite of the ancient North —
Great spaces washed with sun.*

Aye — Kipling's immortal lines were a fitting requiem to the memory of the great dead. Cecil Rhodes was gone, but —

*Living he was the land, and dead,
His soul shall be her soul!*

How well he recalled that memorable pilgrimage thither, as if to a shrine, that he and Musgrave had made together after the war.

Then those two years spent in the Chartered Company's service, before the war came, and the god-forsaken places he was stationed in previous to his transfer to Johannesburg — Umtali, Nhaukoe, Mumbatua Falls, and Inyongo, up in the Mungamba Mountains, with mostly only natives for company. The bright, cool days, and the long, sweet, silent nights afterwards, up in the Magaliesberg Range, where it was so still that it seemed uncanny. The glorious sunrises — the air heavy with the scent of wattle bloom and mimosa flower, as you came out from your tent in the morning, feeling full of the joy of life, healthy and strong, unrecking of the morrow, and amused yourself throwing stones at the baboons that barked " Boom ba! boom ba! " at you from their perches away up on the ledges in the *krantz*es.

And then — " Jo'burg," with its conglomeration of cosmopolitan adventurers. Hard-drinking, busy, grasping men, all struggling gamely in the same great

vortex of speculation in the gold and diamond mines of the Rand, and all breathing the same hatred towards the South African Republic, and the tyranny and injustice of "Oom Paul Kruger" and his ministers, whose grasping avarice and total disregard of even the common rights of citizenship were gradually making the *Uitlander's* lot unbearable.

Yes, but old Oom got *his* afterwards, when the war he had provoked finally overwhelmed him and forced him and Steyn to flee from the country and people that they had ruined. A faint, reflective smile relaxed his somber face as he absently hummed a few lines of a doggerel ditty that had been sung around every camp fire from Pretoria to Capetown in the later stages of the war:

*"Oom Paul Kruger" seems every one's pal
In this wide world, wide world.
For he is such a cleanly, sweet-smelling old chap;
Handkerchiefs, he disdains — gives his fingers a snap;
Oh! ain't it a shame that he's wiped off the map
Of this awfully wide, wide world?"*

Aye, that war. . . . He'd sure done some hard slugging there, one way and another. That two months on the Karroo Desert . . . whew! rotten water — what little there was of it — and fellows going under every day with "enteric." Those cursed night marches, after a long day's *trek*, where your horse kept coming down with you amongst the *meerkat* holes in the dark. Lord! but they were hard, bitter men in that Irregular Horse — had had enough to make 'em — mostly refugees from the Rand. They sure could fight, and were up to all the Boer's tricks, too. That was some scrap at

Wepener, under that burning sun all day. What a smack that bullet gave him. Slap through his body. Felt just like being hit with a hammer. They'd got him at last, but at a price — for had he not deliberately picked off six "*Doppers*" before it came, as he lay cached behind that broken-down Cape cart? . . . Flopped 'em out, one after the other . . . and lots more before that, too, at Elandslaagte, Waggon Hill, and in various small skirmishes.

That chase after De Wet and Kritzinger, long afterwards, during the guerilla warfare that followed, when they and Honeycroft's column converged on Pampoon Poort and nearly nailed the whole bunch. He'd killed five horses in that two weeks' drive. Those Argentines hadn't got much bottom in them, though. Basuto ponies were the stuff — if you were lucky enough to get hold of one — for they mostly got snapped up by the officers. Tough! . . . the cayuses in this country were pretty hard — some of 'em — but they weren't a patch on those little Basutos.

Ah, well, it was all over now; but what misery and fun they had had, mixed. Either a feast or a famine. Starving one day, gorged the next. Things had got pretty slim, though, towards the end, with all the countless columns ravaging the country. Couldn't even get a bit of firewood to boil your coffee, let alone a pig or a chicken. Nothing left except a few thin sheep, and those stringy, pink-eyed Angora goats — worse provender than "bully" or "Macconnochie Ration." The night he, Barney Ebbsworth, and Billy Gardiner "feloni-

ously, and with intent," stole that keg of rum at Norval's Pont, and the glorious drunk that they and the guardians of the neighboring blockhouse had on it.

Yes, they were pretty tough specimens, all right, in that regiment, for the surroundings and conditions they lived under in those haphazard days were not particularly conducive to much close observance of the higher ethics of refinement or morality. "Sufficient unto the day thereof" had been the only maxim that went there, for the span of life was of too doubtful duration, between sun-up and sun-down, to speculate overmuch on what the morrow might bring forth.

He'd done *his* bit, anyway, and had come out of it safely, with three medals and completely restored health. Luckier than lots of the poor devils in his regiment, so many of whom were lying in their lonely graves back there, on which the *aasvogel* perched by day and the hyena prowled around by night — or those that were living, crippled up for life, perhaps, scores of them. No! South Africa was all right in some ways, but he wouldn't care to live there again, for many things. The American continent was a better country for a poor man, after all, and he hadn't done so badly. He'd not saved a fortune, it was true; he'd given more away to others than he'd ever spent on himself, for he was always an easy mark for any poor devil with a hard-luck story. But he'd generally kept a moderate stake in the bank for a rainy day, so there was no particular cause for him to take such pessimistic views of life as he was prone to do at times. He'd much

to be thankful for. His police record was good, and he had risen very quickly during his five odd years' service. For, without being exactly over-zealous, his list of convictions — long-term ones at that — was probably higher than any other man's in the Division, and some of them had caused him to be the recipient of favorable recognition from the Commissioner on more than one occasion.

Yes, without being unduly "stuck on himself," he *did* possess a good many of the natural qualifications requisite for police duty. For stock cases, anyway, and the position he occupied in the province as a Sergeant in the R.N.W.M.P., undoubtedly gave him a certain standing in any community. Grouse and worry as he might, there *was* a good deal of fascination about the life, which was exemplified by the unconsciously keen interest that, entirely apart from the fact of mere duty, he felt in the various crooked problems that he was called upon from time to time to solve.

If only it wasn't such a cursed *lonely* life. Lonely, in the sense of his self-imposed isolation that he felt was incumbent on him, more or less, in the interests of duty. That's what gave *him* the pip, and caused those rotten fits of depression that came over him at times. Yes, there was no doubt about it — he was getting crankier and crankier every year. He was conscious of it. What was coming over him? He didn't use to be like that. Fellows were starting to call him "Old" Ben, too, already. He didn't deserve *that*, surely — even if his hair *was* turning slightly gray. He could still show some of those young men, ten years his junior, a thing or

two yet, in any test of physical endurance or skill.

Yes, it was lonely, all right. But, then, it didn't do for a man situated in a crooked district like he was to get going around with the glad hand, either. That was apt to make a policeman's duty highly disagreeable on occasion, as he knew from past experience. No, the only way was to keep aloof from people as much as possible in a place like this; then they had nothing on you, obligation or anything else, and you could soak it to 'em without compunction whenever occasion arose. They weren't all like Barney Gallagher or Lake. Thank goodness, he could always trust *them*, and could talk freely in their company without having to be continually on his guard.

Thus he continued to muse, his mind reverting in turns to many curious problems, till suddenly rousing himself with a start, he drew back from the window and, stretching and yawning, looked at his watch.

"Lord, what a time I've been dreaming there!" he muttered. "It's too late for grub at the hotel. I guess I'll have to go on down to the Chink's an' get something there."

He lit the lamp and, after hunting around for some cleaning kit, began mechanically to clean his dusty riding boots, preparatory to going out. Whilst thus engaged, the door opened, admitting Sergeant Churchill.

"Hello, Ben," greeted that individual, with an assumption of geniality. "You still here?"

Ellis turned and, straightening himself up, regarded the other with languid interest.

"Hello," he returned. "Train in? Was beginning to think you'd deserted."

Churchill did not answer immediately but, divesting himself of his side-arms and serge, sat down and proceeded to smoke.

"Had a trip up to the 'Pen' with a bunch o' prisoners," he volunteered presently. "Yours amongst 'em. That Fisk started in to give us a lot o' trouble on th' way, but we put th' kibosh on *him* properly, before we got there."

"M'm, m'm," said Benton absently. "He's a bad actor, 'Big George.' How d'you make out with that perjury case of yours?"

"Nine months," answered Churchill laconically.

A long silence ensued, during which Ellis continued his polishing, Churchill eyeing him furtively meanwhile.

"Must have got a bad smash?" he ventured, indicating the other's bandaged head. "Heard all about it at th' Post."

"Oh," replied Ellis indifferently, "did you?"

His tone was anything but encouraging. Churchill licked his lips and essayed another attempt.

"What verdicts did the coroner's jury bring in on those cases?" he inquired, with a forced carelessness in his tone that did not deceive Benton in the least. "I haven't seen th' paper."

Ellis, with his foot on a chair, paused and turned, brush in hand.

"Eh?" he returned irritably.

Churchill, avoiding the other's eyes and fumbling with his pipe, repeated the question.

Benton reached for a memorandum form that

lay on the desk, and tossed it over unceremoniously.

"There's a copy of the wording of the findings," he said shortly. "Condensed, it practically amounts to 'death, caused by an act of justifiable homicide,' in the one case, 'manslaughter,' in the other . . ."

He finished his cleaning operations and proceeded to pull on his serge. Churchill fidgeted uneasily.

"Was there — what kind of evidence was adduced?" he began. "Did —?"

"Here!" interrupted Ellis harshly. "What the devil are *you* beating 'round the bush for? Why don't you come across with it plain? What d'you want to know?"

The local Sergeant flushed angrily, stung to the quick by the rough incivility of his companion's speech and the cold, contemptuous stare that accompanied it, but sheer bodily fear of the ex-pugilist silenced the retort that sprang to his lips, and he sank back in the chair from which he had half arisen.

"Oh — nothing," he mumbled thickly. "I thought p'r'aps —"

"Yes," broke in Benton savagely. "I know what you *thought*, and I'll tell you this much, Mr. 'B——' Churchill. . . . If I hadn't given my evidence mighty darned careful, *you'd* have been on the fly-paper, properly, both feet. *Your* name cropped up during the inquests — one of the jury-men gently inquiring 'why *you* weren't present, as p'r'aps *you* might have been able to throw some light on one or two obscure points in the inquiry.' But, luckily for you, none of the others took his suggestion up." He paused and, emitting a short, ugly laugh, contin-

ued: "I'm under 'open' arrest, an' I've got to go back with Inspector Purvis an' face a formal charge of manslaughter — same as in that Cashell business. We should worry, anyway. What gets *my* goat is you thinkin' you were smart enough to cover up your trail in a little, one-horse '*dorp*' like this. D'you figure you could pull off anything like that, with all these old geezers of women around? What? I don't think. It's a good job for you none o' *them* happened to be called as witnesses. All those who gave evidence were men, an' most of 'em friends o' yours, at that. See here; look! I couldn't exactly say how much you *did* know, but I can make a pretty good guess. There was a lot you couldn't *help* but tumble to, which puts this case entirely outside the ordinary. Anyway, it doesn't look as if you'd had much regard for your own nest."

He remained silent for a space then, his voice shaking ever so little:

"I've got no use for you, Churchill. I'm not stuck on you one little bit . . . an' I guess that feeling is reciprocated, for I can see the mark of my fist on your blooming dial right to this very minute. Mind you, though, I'm not blaming you in any way for *all* that's happened. That's out of the question — an' it wouldn't be logical, or fair. I'm not moralizing, either, for I reckon there's too many 'glass-with-care' labels on both of us to start slingin' rocks at each other — but all the same . . . there's *something* about this business I can't forget . . . an' you know d—n well what that *something* is!"

And, opening the door, he strode out heavily, and banged it behind him.

Ellis, duly tried on the formal charge that had been laid against him, was honorably acquitted of all blame, and returned to duty. Later receiving the grant for his well-earned reward — half of which he, with the utmost difficulty, prevailed upon Musgrave to accept — he obtained ten days' leave and, dragging the latter from his all-absorbing practise for that period, the two departed away up to the Kananaskis Falls on a fishing trip. The doctor insisted on paying all expenses in connection with this outing, and presented his companion with a magnificent English green-heart fly rod, which Ellis had often eyed longingly.

Both men, possessing in a great degree the same morose, taciturn characteristics, they derived a certain grim pleasure in each other's company and, loving and understanding the sport as only good fishermen can, it is needless to say that they had extraordinarily heavy catches and, in their silent, undemonstrative way, enjoyed themselves hugely.

Their time seemed all too short, however, and it was with a feeling of real regret that they finally struck camp and returned once more to the routine of their respective duties, vowing fervently to come again the following season. The Indian summer — that most beautiful and reliable period of the year in the Canadian West — gradually passed. November saw the first fall of snow, and from then onward the weather grew steadily colder as the icy grasp of winter began to grip the West.

Gradually the stock depredations in the Sergeant's district grew more and more infrequent, until they practically ceased altogether for, by this time, men

who had hitherto been inclined to step aside from the straight trail grew afraid of him. Afraid of that sneering, merciless tongue that stung them to the quick with its bitter venom — of the heavy hand that struck by night as well as day — and, of that scheming, cunning brain which, outclassing theirs in its superior knowledge of ways that are dark on the range, seemed to anticipate and forestall every crooked move that they made.

But, what dumbfounded them more than anything else, was the strange apparition of a great, brutal *heart* at the bottom of it all. There was Mrs. Laycock, they reflected, who had been burnt out in that last bad prairie fire, and whose husband he had been the means of sending to the penitentiary a short time before as an incorrigible horse thief. Had not Benton gone into her stable and, single-handed, taken out and hitched up that maddened team to the democrat, getting badly kicked in doing so? And, after driving the woman and her family safely out of the fire zone, returned and routed out every able-bodied man within its radius? and then, not sparing himself, worked them like galley slaves, trailing wet hides and flogging with gunny-sacks until they had got it under?

True, he had come around later with a subscription list in her aid, and a look on his face that seemed to work wonders with those parsimoniously inclined. But did not his own contribution on that occasion exceed by fourfold any one of *theirs*? even if the Government did not pay inordinately high salaries to members of the Force.

And Jim McCloud, too. Had not the Sergeant,

at the imminent risk of his own life, pulled Jim out of that muskeg at Willow Mere one night? Jim was "full," without a doubt; otherwise an old hand like him would never have got himself into such a jack-pot; but, all the same, he well-nigh followed his horse. Had not the Sergeant packed him across his saddle to the nearest ranch — worked over him until he came around and was all right — and then afterwards, cut short Jim's surly thanks with the remark that "he had only saved him that he might have the satisfaction later of getting him where he wanted him"?

Jim McCloud, of all men. Jim, who had been ahead of them all in his bitter vilification of the new policeman and, avowedly, the latter's worst enemy on the range. Only the *two* of them there at the muskeg . . . evening, at that . . . not another soul within sight or hearing. All the Sergeant needed to have done — if he had liked — was to sit in his saddle and just — *watch*.

Of what earthly use were all the many opportunities to rustle that showed up so invitingly at times while such a ruthlessly clever anomaly as he was stationed in the district? A man who seemed to possess endless disguises and hiding places and never to sleep; whose disquieting presence, supremely indifferent to weather conditions or darkness, was apt to upset all their calculations as to his whereabouts in a most sudden and undesirable fashion?

No — so long as *he* was around, it was not worth the while risking "a stretch in the 'Pen,'" even if owners *were* a little lethargic and careless, at times,

232 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

about getting their colts and calves branded. There must be "snitches" in their midst, "double-crossing" them, they argued darkly. *Must* be — otherwise whence had he obtained the knowledge that had led to the undoing of so many? And, as this disturbing possibility continued to gain credence, the seeds of mutual distrust and apprehension were sown broadcast amongst them which, needless to say, was greatly beneficial to the rest of the law-abiding community.

If this altered state of affairs was highly satisfactory to Benton's commanding officer it was even more so to the Stock Association, and the Sergeant was the recipient of many tributes of esteem and gratitude from that sterling body for the good work that he had done.

CHAPTER XVI

"I was a stranger, and ye took me in:"

ST. MATT. XXV, 35

THE long, bright May day had drawn to a close, and darkness was setting in, through which a few faint stars had begun to twinkle. Ah, here was a light at last; and a welcome sight it was to the tired girl, leading an equally tired, fat, old gray horse as, topping a rise in the trail, she beheld the visible signs of a habitation gleaming in the distance.

"Come on, Sam," she coaxed cheerily, with a slightly impatient tug at the reins and quickening her pace. "We'll soon be there, now, old boy, and you'll get a good long drink and a feed!"

Plodding wearily on, they stumbled over the ruts of a well-worn trail diverging at right angles from the one they were traversing, and which the girl instinctively took, guessing that it led to the dwelling whose beacon shone brighter and brighter with every nearing step.

Suddenly she pulled up short for, through a lull in the brisk night breeze — like an Æolian harp — there came to her astonished ears the unmistakable sounds of a piano. A fresh gust of wind carried it away next minute, though, and she moved forward again. Soon the shadowy outlines of a building became visible amid the surrounding gloom, and

the music became distinct and real. Dropping the horse's reins, the girl stepped slowly and carefully towards the light, thrusting out her hands with experienced caution as she did so, fearful of encountering the customary strands of a barbed-wire fence. Meeting with no such obstacle, she drew nearer to the open window, absently humming a bar of "The Bridal Chorus" from "Lohengrin," which air the invisible pianist had, with masterly improvisations, just drawn to a close.

Then she halted, paralyzed for the moment with astonishment — all her own musical instincts fully aroused — as a man's deep, rich baritone voice floated forth on the night air, singing a well-remembered song, but as *she* had never heard it sung before. And, though not of a particularly sentimental temperament, she found it impossible to listen to the beautiful words on this occasion unmoved:

*If I were hanged on the highest hill,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!
I know whose love would follow me still,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!*

Entranced, she stood motionless. Whoever could this unknown vocalist with the magnificent voice be, singing "Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine" in the wilderness? The slow, deep, ineffable pathos of its last verse thrilled and touched her strangely:

*If I were damned of body and soul,
I know whose prayers would make me whole,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!*

As the song ended, she roused herself out of the dreamy reverie into which she had fallen and, mov-

ing forward again, peered through the window. But the light was between her and the singer and she could not see painly. Retracing her steps, she approached the front entrance and knocked gently on the door. There came a crash of chords, a moment's silence, then a firm, decided step sounded inside and the door was opened. She caught only the vague impression of a man's form in the gloom, for the light was hidden from view in the back room; then a pleasant — unmistakably, a gentleman's voice — with a slightly imperious ring in it said:

"Good night, madam. Is anything the matter? Did you wish to see me?"

"I'm — I'm afraid I've lost my way," she answered. "I'm trying to get back to Mr. Trainor's ranch. I've not been in this district very long and I'm — I suppose I'm what you call 'a bit green' as yet at finding my way about on the prairie," she added merrily.

He laughed at her last words. "So," he said. "Seems a bit like it. Dave Trainor's lies about seven miles nor'east of here. You're riding, of course?"

"Oh, yes," she said plaintively. "But all the *decent* horses are away on the spring round-up, and the only one I could get was old Sam, and he's so fat and lazy and slow. It's too much like 'working your passage' with him. That's the principal reason I'm out so late. I'd been to see Mrs. Goddard, at the Bow View ranch, and her husband told me of a trail which he said would be shorter than the one I came by. He wanted to ride back with me, but I was full of self-confidence and thought I could make

it alone all right. Consequence is — here I am, 'lost on the bald-headed,' as they say. Poor old Sam's pretty nearly played out for a drink and a feed — an' — an' so am I," she continued frankly. "I've walked an awful long way to ease him, for I'm not exactly what you'd call a feather-weight."

Her humor was irresistible and infectious. "All right," he said gaily. "You'll find this a pretty rough roadhouse, I'm afraid, though. It's the Mounted Police detachment, and I'm the Sergeant in charge. But — we'll do what we can. You go on in, please, and make yourself at home. I'll fix up your horse now, and get you some supper afterwards."

Ten minutes or so later, he returned from the stable to find his guest sitting on the music stool in the inner room awaiting him. Exclamations of surprised mutual recognition escaped them as they saw each other for the first time in the light.

He beheld the same winsome face and the tall, athletic, majestically proportioned figure of the girl who had spoken to him and admired Johnny, his horse, one day the previous summer, as he was waiting outside Sabbano station while she, for her part, saw the stern, bronzed, scarred face and uniformed figure of the rider with whom she had conversed, and for which lapse she had, incidentally, been so severely censured by her aunt.

Now that he was at leisure to observe her closely he remarked her small, superbly carried head, surmounted with its thick masses of silky, shining, naturally curly, almost blue-black hair, and her face — which, though pleasing, healthy, and happy — could

scarcely be called beautiful at first sight, since the cleft chin was too determined, and the mouth, with its humorous upward curl at the corners of the lips, too large and strong. Her brow was broad, low, and white, with thick, level eyebrows that matched the color of her hair. But it was her speaking, eloquent eyes which attracted him the most. They were of the very darkest hazel; one moment sleeping lazily under their long lashes, the next sparkling and snapping like the sunlight on a rippling stream as they reflected the constant lively and changeful play of their owner's irrepressible emotions. A short Grecian nose, perfect teeth, and a pink-brown complexion that bespoke a love of a fresh air life completed the altogether charming personality of this interesting brunette.

She was attired in a well-worn khaki divided riding-skirt and a plain, white linen blouse, with a red silk scarf loosely knotted around her splendid columnar throat. Her feet — absurdly small for a woman of her generous build — were encased in high-heeled, spurred riding-boots; and as she sat there with an easy, self-possessed grace, a cow-girl's Stetson hat tilted rakishly on her raven-hued, glossy hair, nonchalantly swinging a quirt in one of her fringed gauntlets, she presented a very alluring and delightful picture indeed. Plain, and almost coarse though her dress was, its simplicity only served to enhance the rounded outlines of her abnormally tall, classical, magnificent figure.

"Well, well," said the Sergeant. "This sure is a pleasure. Why, I might have known you again if only from your voice."

238 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

She laughed with a deep, musical, mischievous chuckle, like a boy whose voice is breaking.

"Same here," she said, with emphasis. "Though I've never had the pleasure of hearing yours in song before. Why, you must be the Mounted Policeman I often hear Mr. Trainor speaking of? I never thought to connect you with the same man on the black horse that time last year."

"Sure," he answered, grinning. "Only I hope Dave doesn't libel me as badly as some of 'em do, for I'm very sensitive. My name's Benton — Sergeant Benton."

Her dark eyes flashed roguishly and, drawing off a gauntlet, she held out her hand with a frank, impulsive camaraderie and grasped his with a warm, strong clasp.

"My Good Samaritan," she said simply. "I'm very glad to know you and, since introductions are going, suffice it to say *my* name's O'Malley — Mary O'Malley — and I originally hail from New York. At present I'm companion to Mrs. Trainor, governess to her children — what you will."

He nodded. "Well," he said, "since you've been kind enough to confer the title of 'Good Samaritan' on me, I must make good on the best this poor house can offer you."

And he hustled through into the kitchen. "No, no," he protested laughingly, as she arose with an offer of help and made as if to follow him. "You be good, now, and stay right where you are. You may run things at Dave Trainor's, but I won't have you butting around *my* kitchen. Oh, I'm quite a competent cook, I can assure you."

She gave a little comical grimace of despair. "Oh, very well, then," she said; "I'll just stay here and sulk instead."

And she began to wander around the room, examining all his military accouterments, pictures, and curios, with a lively, almost childlike, interest, calling out from time to time "What this was for?" and "What that was?" etc. Then, suddenly seating herself at the piano, she lifted up a great, rollicking voice and, in an amusing, exaggerated Hibernian brogue, commenced to sing "Th' Waking of Pat Malone":

*Thin — Pat Malone forgot that he was dead —
He raised his head and shouldthers from th' bed;*

Which ditty tickled her host beyond measure as he continued his cooking operations.

Presently, tiring of the piano, she got up and, leaning in the doorway, regarded him with serious, appraising eyes.

"Man," she said solemnly, "'tis th' grand voice that ye have — singin' away all on your lonesome."

And, dropping the brogue, she quoted, to his intense amusement and surprise, a well-worn verse from "Omar Khayyám."

"So," said Ellis, with a delighted chuckle, as the daring and utter absurdity of the quotation, under the circumstances, struck him, "it's kind of you to suggest it. All the ingredients are at hand, too, except the 'Flask of Wine,' 'Wilderness enow,' particularly. . . . Sorry about the Wine, though, after that compliment. Unfortunately, we're strictly 'on the tack,' as we call it, just now. Oh, 'Barkis is willin',' all right."

He cleared the books and papers off the table in the living-room and, spreading out the simple repast that he had prepared for her, drew up a chair.

"Grub pi-i-ile!" she shrilled, in droll imitation of a camp cookee; and, seating herself, she attacked the frugal meal with a healthy appetite that fully demonstrated her previous admission that she was hungry.

"Sorry I forgot to ask whether you'd have tea or coffee," he said apologetically. "I've made you coffee."

"Oh, that's all right," she said carelessly. "I much prefer coffee. Thanks. My! but I'm hungry!"

He sat down in one of the easy chairs opposite and, leaning his head back against the leopard skin, watched her with a lively and all-absorbing interest. Her complete self-possession and confidence, and the unconventional manner in which she proceeded to make herself entirely at home in the detachment, amused and astounded him. He remembered the impulsive, winning way that she had come over and spoken to him on the occasion of their first meeting. She was a new type to him and he realized that she was quite out of the ordinary.

She was not "mannish," but there seemed to be a good deal of the irresponsible boy, as it were, left in her. She couldn't be a strolling ex-actress, he reflected. The utter absence of coquetry, the fresh, healthy, open-air look of her, and the mention that she had made of the position she occupied at the Trainors' immediately dispelled that idea. And besides, Dave Trainor's wife was a lady-like, nice

woman and — particular. He was a frequent and welcome caller at their ranch — knew them intimately.

No, she was all right. Just a big, simple, jolly girl, well bred and educated; brought up, perhaps, amongst a host of brothers and their friends so, therefore, accustomed to masculine society, and most likely preferring it to her own sex. Mixing with them in their out-door sports — clean minded, healthy specimens like herself — daring, high spirited and impulsive, without being brazen and bold — funny, without being vulgar. Her manner, and clear, frank, honest eyes showed him that. Used to being teased and welcomed everywhere — clever, mirth loving, independent, self-reliant, kind and brave.

It was thus that he mentally diagnosed the character of his fair guest. He was no vain, smirking Lothario, but he instinctively guessed how that strong mouth of hers could set, and those hazel eyes blaze and scintillate with dangerous anger at times; and that the man who was ill-advised and — ignorant enough — to ever make the foolish break of misconstruing her careless geniality for anything else *but* that, was only inviting disaster of the most ignominious and humiliating kind.

Her gaze flitted around the room continually as she appeased her appetite, and he was subjected to an exacting and minute inquisition anent the duties and life of a Mounted Policeman.

“And do they supply your detachments with pianos, too?” she inquired ingenuously. “Now, you needn’t laugh. I believe you’ve only been tell-

ing me a lot of nonsense. 'I was a stranger, so you took me in.' It's too bad of you."

"Honor bright, I haven't," he protested, with a grin. "I've told you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Pianos! Oh, my long-suffering Force. No, we get a pretty good outfit, but the Government don't extend their generosity quite *that* far. This musical box belongs to the Honorable Percy Lake. He's a rich Englishman who plays at 'rawnching' here — a 'jolly boy,' as we call 'em. His place is about five miles due west from here; it's fitted up like a Fifth Avenue mansion. Oh, he's no end of a swell. But it's caddish of me to make fun of him, for he's an awfully decent chap at heart, in spite of his lazy, fastidious ways, and a man — every bit of him. He's away in California just now. He and his wife always flit South with the geese before the winter sets in, but they should be back any old time now. He was scared the punchers would ruin this piano if it was left to their tender mercies. It's a pretty good one, I believe — a Broadwood. Had it shipped out from the Old Country and, as he knows I'm fond of music, he insisted on carting it over here. Kind enough, but whatever I'd do with it if I was transferred suddenly anywhere else, I don't know. It'll be a relief, in a way, when he redeems it."

He got up and poured her some more coffee, remarking a little anxiously:

"I suppose the Trainors will be having a search party out for you, thinking something's happened. Shouldn't wonder but what Dave's on his way down here right now to notify me."

"Oh, no; don't you worry," she said reassuringly. "I told them I *might* stay at the Goddard's place for the night. I would have done so, only I found little Willy Goddard was sickening for measles and I didn't want to take chances in my capacity of governess of probably passing it on to the Trainors' children — Bert and Gwyn. Not that I'm scared for myself — I've had it, years and years ago. Oh, the Trainors know I'm jolly well able to take care of my little self," she added, with a slight suggestion of defiant challenge in her tones and look which stirred the fiery Benton blood in his veins strangely.

"Yes, you just bet you are!" he ejaculated admiringly, as he appraised her strong, splendid figure. "You're away taller than I am, and I shouldn't wonder if you don't *weigh* heavier, too. Riding keeps my weight down, though. I don't suppose I go more'n a hundred and seventy-five; but that's plenty heavy enough for a horse."

She nodded carelessly. "Went one hundred and seventy-eight last week when I weighed myself on the grain scales — and I'm five feet ten and a half. Oh, Finnegan, that's me!

"I had quite an adventure coming along," she continued, with reflective gravity. "After I'd left the Goddards' I came through a place away back on the trail there — I think it's called 'Fish Creek.' I was passing by a bit of an old homestead — you couldn't dignify it with the title of 'ranch.' There was a tumble-down old shack there, anyway, and as I came round the front of it — the trail bends there — I saw a funny little old man standing, or rather, leaning, in the doorway. He'd got a bottle in his

hand and, oh! he *was* so tipsy — singing away like anything.

“Well, as soon as he caught sight of me, he raised his bottle and shouted ‘*Urroo!*’ I didn’t know what he was rejoicing about, but of course I shouted ‘*Urroo!*’ back. And then I suppose he intended to come over and speak to me, but the steps of his shack were broken and, oh, dear! he came such an awful tumble off his perch and smashed the bottle all to pieces.”

Ellis gave a shout of laughter. “Why, that must be old Bob Tucker,” he said. “He’s always getting ‘lit up.’ Did he scare you?”

The great, smiling girl arose and, dusting some crumbs off her lap, drew herself up to her full regal height and looked down upon him with pitying toleration.

“Huh!” she ejaculated. But words cannot express the world of scornful amusement, derision, and incredulity that she put into the exclamation. “Scare nothing! the poor little, dirty old tipsy thing. I got off Sam and picked him up, and then I saw he’d cut one of his hands on the broken bottle. It was bleeding ever so badly, and a piece of the glass was still sticking in the cut. When he saw he’d lost all his whiskey he started to swear something awful — leastways I *think* it was swearing. . . . It sounded like it, but it was in a funny language I couldn’t understand. And then he began to cry. Oh, I *was* so sorry for him. I helped him up the steps into the shack, and got some water and washed his cut hand — then I tied it up with my handkerchief. All the time he kept whimpering: ‘Oh, gor-

blimey, it 'urts! it 'urts!' And he kept calling me '*intombi*.' What's that mean?"

"It's Zulu," said Ellis. "It means 'young woman.' I guess he was swearing in Kaffir or the *Taal*. He's an old Cockney, but he's lived the best part of his life in South Africa."

"Well," she continued, "after I'd fixed up his hand he stopped crying and commenced to shout: 'Urroo! Urroo!' again. And then he pulled a dirty old letter out of his pocket and began to tell me it was from 'Jack 'Arper,' who, he explained, was a friend of his son's, somewhere down in Eastern Ontario. 'E tells me my b'y 'Arry's *vrouw's doed!* — gorn to 'eving!' he says, in a screech you could pretty nearly hear to Sabbano. And it was awful the way he chuckled and grinned over it. Just as if it was some great joke. 'An' Jack, 'e says as 'ow 'Arry's bin *dronk* ever since, but wevver it's becos 'e's sorry, or becos 'e's glad, w'y 'e don't know. . . . An' 'e says as 'ow 'Arry wants me to come back Heast an' live wiv 'im on th' farm. An' I'm a-goin', too!' he says. 'I've sold aht this old plice — an' me stock — to Walter 'Umphries, an' I'm a-goin' to *trek* next week. 'Urroo! Urroo! 'ere goes nuthin'!' "

Ellis, at this point, was convulsed with mirth; for her exact mimicry of old Tucker's Cockney speech was startlingly natural and funny in the extreme.

The girl laughed with him, continuing: "He was stumbling about and waving his arms all the while he was telling me this joyful news, and he wanted to get me some supper but, ugh! . . . I simply couldn't. The place and everything was so

dirty — like a pigstye. I was glad to get away, and I left him standing on the broken steps waving his bandaged hand to me. The poor old thing! does he live there all alone?"

Ellis nodded. "Yes," he said. "I've been trying to get him to sell out and go and live with his son down East for a long time now. I'm glad to hear he's going at last. He's too old to live alone like that. His daughter-in-law was the obstacle. The reason I asked you if you were scared was because he's got a playful way of flourishing a loaded rifle around sometimes when he gets on these toots. He put the fear into me properly one time, I remember."

A photograph, slightly yellow with age, in a splendid silver frame on the piano attracted her attention and, with an "Excuse me," she crossed over and scrutinized it long and earnestly. It was the sweet, proud, regally beautiful face of a woman attired in an evening dress of the style worn in the early 'seventies. Ah! no need to tell her who *that* was! For, in spite of his mutilated ear and scarred, bronzed face, she recognized in the portrait the same regular, clean-cut features and steady eyes of the man who sat there silently watching her, with his head thrown out into strong relief against the leopard-skin kaross.

She glanced at him in mute inquiry, and back to the photograph again, instinctively guessing *now* whence the inspiration of that moving song had come which had been the means of arousing in her a greater interest in her host than she would perhaps have cared to admit.

"It's my mother," he said simply, interpreting her look. "She died when I was just a kid at school. A little over a year before I came out to the States."

There was silence for awhile and presently he sprang up briskly.

"Well, now, I don't want to hurry you, Miss O'Malley," he said, "but we've got seven miles to go and it's a quarter to eleven now. They'll all have gone to roost at the Trainors' long ago, I expect. I'm going to give you a *good* horse to ride . . . the black fellow you liked so much." (She gave a little exclamation of delight.) "The work began to pile up — there's some awful long patrols to do here. It was too much for one horse, so I kicked for another and got it. I ride 'em turn about. There's a good pasture at the back, with water, so when I go away for a few days I can always turn the spare one out. I'll shove your saddle onto Johnny — he's quiet — and I'll ride Billy and trail old Sam alongside."

She thanked him prettily and gratefully for the hospitable entertainment accorded her and his kind offer of guidance.

"Oh, not at all; not at all," he replied cheerily. "It's the other way about, I'm thinking. You've quite livened things up around here. I'm a kind of a lonely beggar. You can't think how I've enjoyed your company. Well, I'll go and get those horses and we'll hit the trail."

To the lonely man that night ride to the Trainors' ranch with such an interesting companion seemed all too short, and but for the late hour and the fact

of her being by now very tired, he could have wished the distance longer.

Everything was dark and still as they neared the ranch, until two huge coyote hounds hearing their approach ran out barking, and overwhelmed them with a boisterous welcome when they dismounted. Hitching the horses to the fence, Ellis swung open the hanging gate of the square, railed-in enclosure within which the ranch dwelling stood, and they walked slowly up the path. Aroused by the dogs, Trainor himself came out to meet them with a lighted lantern in his hand.

"Hello, people!" was his hearty greeting. "What's abroad? That you, Mary? Why, Sergeant, it's you, eh? What's this young lady been up to now? Is she under arrest?"

"Sure thing," said Ellis, laughing. "I'm thinking of charging her with 'vagrancy'—found her wandering around the prairie 'riding the grub line.'"

Explanations followed, and Trainor led the way into the house. It was a comfortable, home-like, roomy dwelling, simply, but well and substantially furnished, with many splendid bear, deer, and other skins scattered around the painted hardwood floor in lieu of carpets, for Trainor had traveled considerably, and been a mighty hunter in former years. The well-stocked book shelves, the piano, and a few, but good, oil paintings and engravings that adorned the walls, seemed to imply that the owners were people of substance and refinement. Trainor was a tall, strongly-built man of fifty or thereabouts, with a heavy, fair mustache and a humorous, weather-beaten face. His speech, although slightly nasal,

was that of an educated American, and his genial, kind-hearted personality created an instinctive liking with all who met him.

He was roughly dressed in a waistcoat, gray-flannel shirt, with blue overalls tucked into high riding-boots; for, apart from the fact that he was well-to-do, and one of the largest stock owners in the district, he was a worker himself, and liked to superintend the running of his ranch personally.

"The wife's gone to bed long ago," he said. "I was sitting up, reading, when I heard the dogs start in to yap. Why, Mary, my girl! I thought you said you were going to stay the night at the Goddards'? They've got the measles there, eh? Well, all's well that ends well, thanks to Sergeant Benton, here. Trust you not to get left, anyway. You look pretty well played out, though. You'd better go to roost or you'll be losing your good looks. Won't she?"

"Impossible!" exclaimed the sergeant, with such fervent emphasis that a faint blush arose on the girl's rather tired face, as she thanked him again and bid him "Good-night."

He chatted awhile with Trainor, who had hospitably produced a bottle of whiskey, and presently got up and prepared to depart, refusing the latter's invitation for him to stay the night.

"Can't chance it tonight, Dave," he said. "I'm anticipating the arrival of one of our officers — Inspector Purvis. He's about due here, visiting detachments, and I don't want to be away when he comes. Thanks, all the same! No, you needn't come out. I'll off-saddle and fix up old Sam. So long."

CHAPTER XVII

*Of lovers she had a full score,
Or more,
And fortunes they all had galore,
In store;
From the minister down
To the clerk of the Crown,
All were courting the Widow Malone,
Ohone!
All were courting the Widow Malone.*

CHARLES LEVER

IN spite of his morose and surely somewhat fantastic constancy, which obsession, be it remarked, he was rather prone to exaggerate than minimize, and the bitter, hopeless philosophy with which he had come to regard his single and seemingly inevitable lot, it must be admitted that Ellis found his mind subconsciously reverting on many occasions during the next few weeks to the girl who had so unconventionally invaded his bachelor quarters.

"Yes, begad! there *was* a strong fascination about her," he soliloquized. She was so totally different to any other woman who had come into his lonely life. Several times, too, he found this same compelling influence answerable for his change of direction as he found himself absently swinging off the main trail north into the one that diverged east and led to the Trainors' ranch where, by now, he had come to be regarded as a regular and welcome visitor.

The girl, on her part naturally enough, was by no means oblivious to the reason of his frequent calls, though she always greeted him with her customary careless, wide-eyed geniality, their acquaintance by now having ripened into the intimacy of teasing, playful badinage, at which pastime, needless to say, both of them excelled.

With an innate delicacy that was only natural and instinctive in one come of his gentle birth and early breeding, he had forborne from ever asking her the reason that she was occupying the comparatively humble position of governess, lady companion, or — as she herself had put it — “what you will,” on a ranch. It puzzled him. When he had first met her the year previous she was then apparently traveling in state, plainly, although richly, dressed, with an elderly aunt, who — her disagreeable and snobbish manner notwithstanding — distinctly radiated every indication of imposing worldly affluence.

Anyway, those were the impressions that he had formed in the brief glimpse afforded him of the two ladies on that occasion. On this head he one day casually sounded Dave Trainor, as the two of them lounged in the stable talking cattle and horse, preparatory to the Chinese cook's shrill summons of “Glub pl-i-i-ile!” heralded with the customary knuckle tattoo on an inverted dishpan. Trainor, with a slight touch of reminiscent garrulity — a mannerism of his — and with his usual preface:

“Now, see here; look! I'll tell you how that is, Sergeant,” proceeded to enlighten him. “I've known that girl,” he began, “and all her family for many years back — ever since she was a little slip

of a kid, in fact. I started out in life as a mining engineer. That's my real profession, though I've been in the ranching business now for twenty years or more. It must have been in 'seventy-four, or thereabouts, when I first met her father — Terence O'Malley — in New York. He was a mining stock-broker then, and being more or less mixed up in the same class of business, we drifted together and became pretty chummy. He was a typical harum-scarum Irishman out of Ireland. One of those lovable, brilliant kind of ducks — the life and soul of whatever company he was in. A regular 'Mickey Free.' Of good birth and education, clever and shrewd in his business, but a proper gambler at heart, and impulsive and changeable as the wind. She's very like him in many ways — got all his impulsiveness, witty humor and brogue, but without his selfishness and improvidence. Oh, he was sure some high flier, O'Malley. Made fortunes in one day — lost 'em the next. You know the way they run amuck on the Stock Exchange? He married a New York girl — think her name was Egan. Anyway, *she* was of Irish extraction, too. This girl — Mary — is the eldest of the family. She's got four brothers, but they all came some years later — there's quite a space in between her and them. Somehow another they were all brought up and received pretty fair educations. The boys have got decent enough positions in various parts of the States — able to keep themselves now, at all events. They're good kids enough, but inclined to be a bit wild — possess a lot of the characteristics of their old man. He died about three years ago — of dis-

appointment and shock, when the final crash came in his fortunes. I guess his heart was weak.

"It was a queer household, theirs, as you can imagine, with the fluctuating nature of the father's income — and he was one of those who never dreamt of laying by for a rainy day. Yes, *sir!* I tell you there were hard struggles at times in that family. One week — on 'Easy Street.' The next — 'broke to the wide' — unable to pay the rent. O'Malley's wife had died in giving birth to the last boy and afterwards, all through their ups and downs, that girl kept things as straight as she could. She was a regular mother to the boys in those days — has been all along. They'd have all gone to the devil long enough ago if it hadn't been for her. She's twenty-eight now, though she don't look it. After her father died, she went to live with an aunt of hers — a Mrs. Gorman, of Philadelphia. She's sure got the 'rocks,' all right, but I guess she's about as disagreeable an old party as you could find. You've seen her, you say?" (Ellis nodded grimly.) "Well, her acquaintance doesn't belie her face. I don't know how on earth Mary stuck to her for so long. It was a case of 'nowhere else to go,' I guess, poor girl, and she's very patient. Must have had a hard time of it, from what little she's told us. She isn't the bewailing sort that cry their troubles abroad to all and sundry they meet, but I suppose it got too thick for even her to stand any longer, so she decided to cut loose from 'Aunty.' She wrote to the wife, asking her if she knew of any position that she could earn her own living at over on this side. So that's how it is she's here, looking after

254 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

Bert and Gwyn. Those kids just worship her. Seems she prefers this fresh air life to an office job. You might know that, anyway, by the look of her. I tell you, I respect and admire that girl, Benton. Hello! was that 'Grub pile!' just went? Come on in, or we'll be getting a scolding for being late."

Slowly but, nevertheless surely, as the weeks, and gradually months, went by, and their intimacy increased, the inevitable happened to Ellis and Mary; for mere platonic friendship between two individuals of their warm-blooded natures was impossible amidst such surroundings, and by imperceptible degrees their mutual interest and liking for each other had developed into a stronger feeling.

But still Ellis wavered. For the pessimistic ideas that he held regarding a Mounted Policeman's general life, insufficient pay, and hazardous occupation — in the non-commissioned ranks, anyway — rendering him unfit for marriage ties, continued to obsess him and slightly warp his ordinarily generous, impulsive nature. The habits of years are not easily broken, and long companionship with Musgrave had not tended to mitigate his views. Since the death of his first love he had, in a great degree, held aloof from women's society, keeping a tight curb on himself and rigidly repressing all his emotions. In whatever few convictions he possessed regarding the grand passion he was an idealist, and wedded bliss in the form of the average smug, thrifty marriage of convenience — contracted usually by the man of meager or moderate means — did not appeal to him at all.

Whether or not the girl reciprocated his affection a characteristic lack of vanity precluded his knowing, for as yet there had been no love passages between them to warrant his believing so. He thought she liked, and was not altogether indifferent to him, and that was all.

It is not to be supposed that he was entirely alone in his attentions to that debonair young woman. Her sex were not over numerous in the neighborhood, and she was therefore distinctly attractive to the various bachelors — young, middle-aged, and old — who resided within a twenty-mile radius of the Trainors' establishment. Thus it may be inferred that she did not lack suitors, many of them admittedly eligible as regards their possession of worldly goods — a fact which Ellis forcibly realized at times, when the bitter consciousness of his own limited means and prospects would come home to him with cruel intensity.

But the strong, sane, logical mind of the man predominated, and he kept himself well in hand. They had the prior right, he argued; for, plain and homely though most of them might be, they didn't hang fire like him, anyway. They were in the position to give the girl a better home than he could ever hope to offer her. He would therefore be no "dog-in-the-manger" to stand in their way, he decided. So, whenever he chanced to find one of these would-be suitors ahead of him in the field, he always promptly excused himself and withdrew; which policy of self-effacement, be it remarked, piqued poor Mary not a little.

He was not exactly made of the stuff that calcu-

256 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

lating, luke-warm, cautious lovers are prone to be composed of, but the fires of jealousy had once scorched him pretty severely and the memory of the lively torment that he had endured in those miserable days was still too vivid in his recollection to risk a possible repetition of that dread disease.

He need have had no fear. One and all — irrespective of age, wealth, or appearance, she treated them with the same laughing impartiality, rendering to each the same answer. In kindly fashion at that, too, for she realized only as a dowerless spinster can, that the well-meaning, earnest love of an honest man is not a thing to be contemptuously cast aside or scoffed at. As often as not Ellis, nearing the Trainers' ranch, with the intention of paying a visit, would chance to observe one of these rejected, love-lorn swains galloping or driving away in eccentric haste; and, hopelessly in love though he himself was, that fact did not, however, totally eclipse his sense of humor.

He was only human, and the sight of a discomfitted rival beating an ignominious retreat — or as he (Ellis) put it — "chasing himself over the bald-headed," was too irresistibly funny a spectacle to prevent a surly chuckle escaping him. And, postponing his intended visit just then, from motives of delicacy, he would ride on his way, in all probability, rejoicing.

CHAPTER XVIII

*She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
Devour up my discourse:*

OTHELLO: ACT I, SC. 3

ONE glorious September afternoon, appreciating the girl's fondness for riding Johnny, Ellis rode over to the Trainors', leading his favorite mount. Entering the house, he received the usual kindly welcome from the rancher and his wife; the latter a stoutish, jolly-looking woman with a great mass of fair, fluffy hair — some years her husband's junior.

"Well, well," she said, looking up at him with playful amusement. "And where, *sir*, have you been hiding yourself lately? We'd begun to think you must have fallen down a gopher hole or something."

He walked through into the kitchen and drank a dipperful of water thirstily, before he answered. Returning, he grinned significantly at his hostess.

"All right, let it go at that, Mrs. Trainor," he replied. "Here, Gwyn!" he continued, slewing around and catching hold of that little blonde seven-year-old fairy, "where's Miss O'Malley?"

"Shan't tell you!" came the mutinous giggle.

"Oh, yes, you will," he said, tickling her. "Come on, now; you tell, or I'll — I'll take you out

and put you right on top of the barn for that big sparrow-hawk to come and get! He likes little girls like you. One! Two! — are you going to tell me — ? ”

“ Yes, yes ! ” came the smothered squawk. “ Put me down, though. She — she’s drying her hair in the sun back of the house,” she whispered gravely.

“ Is she? Well, you go and tell her I want her,” he whispered back. “ Run like anything.”

“ Oh, she’ll come quick enough when she knows you’ve got Johnny for her to ride,” remarked Trainor, smiling. “ She won’t look at that Pedro horse of mine so long as *he’s* around. Say ! ” he broke off. “ Bert’s sure getting to be some marksman, ain’t he? He’ll be running you pretty close when he gets older, Sergeant. Look at that, now ! ”

These remarks were occasioned by the entrance of a sturdy youngster of nine, who was proudly dangling the carcass of half a dozen fat gophers.

“ No, no, Bert! You mustn’t bring them in here ! ” cried his mother sharply. “ Take them outside and give them to Tom and Jerry ! ”

Hugging a small “ twenty-two ” rifle and his dead gophers, the boy gave a roguish grin at Ellis and departed, followed by two huge mewing tomcats.

“ Little brutes were just ruining the garden,” said Trainor, “ so I put Bert onto them. He’s just having the time of his life with that new gun I bought him.”

Ellis, seating himself at the piano with an assurance that bespoke long familiarity in that kindly, homelike household, began to idly strum: “ Come, Lasses and Lads,” with a whistling accompaniment.

Suddenly a shadow darkened the open door, and a mischievous voice greeted him with:

"Hello, 'Mancatcher'! What brings you here this late along? We'd begun to think something had happened to you."

With her great, shimmering, glorious mass of glossy black hair rippling and tumbling about her teasing, slightly sunburnt face, Mary looked like a girl of eighteen. And as she stood there, with her superb figure drawn up to its full height, she made a picture that aroused the Sergeant's slumbering passion anew with increased fervor.

But his well-trained visage and voice evinced nothing of his feelings as he returned her pleasantry with an answering careless:

"Why, hello, 'Mousetrap'! Comin' for a ride?"

Mrs. Trainor exploded with bubbling mirth.

"Why, why! whatever new nicknames are these? You two'll be forgetting what your real names are altogether soon. I never heard such nonsense."

"It isn't, Mrs. Trainor," said Ellis aggrievedly. "It's just *that* — mice! I found her busy catching 'em in one of the oat bins in the stable the other day. She just catches and plays with 'em — lets 'em run, then grabs 'em again."

"Huh!" said the girl contemptuously. "That's nothing! I'm not afraid of mice. Poor little things. Besides, I had gauntlets on."

"No," said Ellis slowly, with a mocking chuckle, "it'd take more than a mouse to scare *you* — we know that! Come! I'll trade you aliases. I haven't caught a man for over two months now."

260 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

His mischievous meaning was only too obvious, and the girl colored to her laughing eyes, grabbing, next instant, a ball of wool from Mrs. Trainor's lap, which she shied at him.

Benton, dodging this missile, gazed piercingly at her for several seconds without moving a muscle of his face; then, suddenly swinging around on the music-stool, he brought down his hands with a crash of chords and, in a great rollicking voice and a broad Somersetshire dialect, commenced to sing a bucolic love ditty. Something that went:

*"Vor if yeou conzents vor tu marry I now,
Whoy—Vather 'e'll gie uns 'is old vat zow!
With a rum dum—dum dum—double dum day!"*

"Boo-o-oo! La, la, la!" shrilled poor Mary, covering her ears. "Oh, *please*, Mrs. Trainor, *do* make him stop!"

"What's the use, my dear?" cried that merry dame, in great amusement. "He wouldn't listen to me. He's too impudent for anything."

While Trainor slapped his thigh and guffawed uproariously.

"Oh, oh!" screamed the girl, stamping and pirouetting about the room, "he's starting *another* verse! Oh, quit, quit, quit! or *I'll* start in opposition! I'll make such a noise they won't be able to hear you!"

And at the top of her voice she started to declaim lustily:

*"Arrah, go on! You're only taxin!
Arrah, go on! You're somethin' awful!
Arrah, go on! You're mighty plazin!
Oh, arrah go way! go wid yer! go way! go on!"*

"That settles it," shouted Ellis, jumping up. "I'll sure give in to *that*. Peccavi! I'll chuck up the sponge. But you be good after this now, or I'll sing you some *more* 'Zummerzet.' Don't bother about getting your hair done up again, Miss O'Malley. It looks 'Jake' like that. Just tie a bit of red ribbon round. Come on; go and get your riding things on. Johnny's feeling pretty good — hasn't been out for three days now."

"Oh, my, but that's great!" gasped Mary ecstatically, half an hour later, as they pulled their excited, eager horses up to a walk, after a perilous neck-and-neck gallop, supremely careless of whatever badger-holes lay in their course on the long, flat stretch. "Aha, Johnny, old boy! you sure do like to be let out for a run, don't you?" she continued caressingly, as she patted the arched, swelling neck of the great springy beast under her who, with a network of quivering, hard, grain-fed muscles rippling beneath his smooth, black-satiny coat, sidled and paced with daintily uplifted forefeet. The powerful animal carried his substantially-built rider as if she were only a child, flattening his ears and biting with equine playfulness meanwhile at Billy, the big, upstanding, well-coupled-up bay that Ellis was riding.

"Well, whither away?" he inquired. "Where shall we go? Gosh, but it's hot!"

"Let's go up on the top of that big hill over to the west there — where that flat stone is," she said, indicating a high, conical hill, something like a South African *kopje* that loomed up in the distance. "I

always call it 'Lone Butte' because it's all by itself. It's cooler up there, and we can lazy around and look at the mountains."

Half an hour's ride over steadily rising ground brought them to their destination and, arriving at the foot of the aforesaid butte, they dismounted and, leaving their horses to graze, with dropped lines, slowly made the ascent. There, on the extreme top, a relic of some vast upheaval in the past, was a huge, long, low-lying flat stone, upon which Mary seated herself and, removing her Stetson hat, let the cool breeze play on her forehead and blow the shining tendrils of hair about her face. Ellis flung himself out at full length on the short turf at her feet and together they silently gazed in huge contentment at the panorama that lay unfolded before them.

Below, looking east, shimmering with the little heat waves, the long rolling vistas of greenish-brown prairie lay stretched out to the horizon, through which, like a gleaming silver thread, wound the Bow River; while to the west, above the pine-dotted foothills of a great Indian Reserve, rose the up-flung, snow-capped violet peaks of the mighty "Rockies," the hot afternoon's sun enveloping all in its sleepy golden haze.

The Sergeant, with his chin resting in his hands, looked long and lovingly at the peaceful beauty of the scene.

"Begad, just look at *that* now!" he murmured. "No wonder a fellow loves an open-air life in the West . . . there's a picture for some poor beggar that's p'r'aps cooped up in an office all day, what?"

. . . just the kind of background Charley Russell always manages to get into his pictures, isn't it? To my mind he and Remington are the only artists who can depict the prairie and its life properly — *they* don't slur over detail like some of 'em. No matter whether it's landscape, Indians, cow-punchers, horses, cattle, hunting scenes, gun-scrap, or what not, they give you the real thing — correct in every item. *That's* what hits us who live *in* such backgrounds. They not only make you *see* it on canvas, they positively make you *feel* it. . . . Well, Charley Russell ought to know, if any man! . . . he punched cattle and wrangled horses for a living — long before he ever thought of painting!"

A gopher popped up its head out of a hole a few feet away from Benton and, after blinking inquisitively awhile with its beady brown eyes at the two human beings who remained so still, it apparently decided that there was nothing to fear from them and emerged fully from its retreat. With tucked-in paws, it sat bolt upright and regarded them with grave interest.

Ellis eyed the rodent indolently for a space; then, reaching cautiously to his hip, he half drew a deadly-looking "Luger" pistol from its holster — to which previously mentioned confiscated weapon sinister memories were attached. The girl saw his movement and involuntarily thrust out a protesting hand.

"No, no!" she said, in a loud eager whisper. "Don't shoot the poor little chap — it isn't as if he was in the garden. 'Live, and let live,' you know. Oh, you *nasty* thing!"

264 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

As the Sergeant, laughing quietly, in lazy acquiescence, jerked his gun home again and, instead, spat with unerring aim on the gopher's fat back, which insult caused it to dive instantly into its hole again. For a long time they remained silent, drinking in the fresh air; then the girl who, with elbows-in-lap, was leaning forward absently swinging her quirt, flicked her abstracted companion playfully.

"Come! don't go to sleep," she said. "A dime for your thoughts, O man of many moods! You look like Hamlet watching the play — lying gazing away there. . . . Wake up and talk to me, sir!"

Ellis, who lay stretched out with his back, turned to her, rolled over and looked up into the long-lashed, half mocking, half serious hazel eyes.

"'Hamlet'!" he echoed, with an amused chuckle. "And pray what have *I* done to deserve the honor of being likened unto 'the melancholy Dane,' kind lady? 'Wot shall I tork abaht?' as old Bob Tucker would say. 'Bid me discourse — I will enchant thine ear!' — à la 'Baron Munchausen.'"

"No, don't be foolish," she said beseechingly. "Can't you be serious for once in a while, please? I don't feel in the mood for any 'Munchausen' nonsense *just* now. Confine yourself strictly to the truth on this occasion. Just tell me *who* you are — where you came from — and what you've done for your living ever since you can remember! There, now, you've got your orders in full . . . fire away!"

Ellis gave a dismal whistle. "Pretty big order on short notice," he said. "If you expect me to fill all that, extempore, I'll have to limit it to a synopsis."

There was, undoubtedly, a strong fascination about

Benton, and few there were of either sex who came into contact with him that did not fall under the spell of his personal magnetism. The dry humor he emitted at times, and the utter absence of self-consciousness or vanity in his quiet, forceful personality, may have accounted for this in a great measure. Also, in a simple, direct fashion, he could "talk well"; and when he chose to exert himself, or was in the mood, could be a most interesting companion as a raconteur, drawing upon a vast reserve of experiences accumulated during his stirring, eventful, wandering life.

The quiet peace of his surroundings were conducive to such a mood just now and, as the girl adroitly drew him on, he responded, and talked of his past life as perhaps he had never done to man or woman before. Those who love make good listeners and, as Mary, sitting there, heard with an all-absorbing interest of his strange ups and downs, trials, hopes, and adventures, she gained a vivid and lasting impression of the career of a strong man who, early in life, had cut himself adrift from kith and kin; glimpsing something of the real, deep, complex nature of this careless soldier of fortune who, all unconsciously, had won her heart long ago.

His story began with his early schoolboy recollections. The unhappy period following his mother's death, and his final emigration to the United States; then passed on, fantastically, through innumerable chops and changes of life. It told of a wild, haphazard existence in camps, and on the range in Montana and Wyoming, the lure of the gaming table, and the companionship with men of nearly every nation-

266 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

ality under the sun. Desperate ventures in bubble speculations that either broke or made the investors, of chances missed by the merest margin of time and travel. It touched on all the phases of his pugilistic career, his later adventures on the South African veldt and memories of the great war. He described his return from that unquiet land, how he had eventually joined the Mounted Police, the years that had followed in that Force, and some of the various cases that had brought him his third stripe. Sometimes on foot, more often on horseback, now fairly prosperous, now poor, in and out, back and forth, chore boy, cookee, bronco-buster, pugilist, Chartered Company's servant, Irregular soldier, and finally Mounted Policeman, moved Ellis Benton, taking his chance honestly and bravely in the great game of Life.

All this he related without bravado, deprecating false modesty or extravagant gesture, and the simple, earnest manner in which he told his life's story caused the great, generous heart of the listening girl to go out to him in a wave of love and sympathy — the outward expression of which she had difficulty in controlling.

Gradually, however, his mood changed, and the trend of his experiences veering from the hard-bitten facts of ordinary police duty to the more humorous occurrences that from time to time vary its red-tape-bound monotony, he recounted several laughable episodes in which he had been involved at different periods. The relation of these tickled the girl's imagination greatly.

"Yes," he said musingly. "We do get up

against some funny propositions at times, that any one who's blessed in the least degree with the saving sense of humor can't help but appreciate. If it wasn't for these occasional little happenings our life would be pretty dull. I remember one time"—he checked himself, with a laugh. "Bah! I'm yarn-ing away like an old washerwoman full of gin and trouble."

"Will you go on?" Mary said, leaning towards him with dancing eyes.

The thrill in her voice — strangely contagious it was — told how much she was interested. It was not to be wondered at. There was only one man on earth for whom she really cared — he lay stretched before her then, and probably what attracted her most in him was his manly simplicity and the sincerity of his tones and expression which, somehow, always had the knack of carrying absolute conviction with them in the narration of even the most trivial story.

"Well," Ellis went on, "I was on Number Thirteen — south-bound — one day, about eighteen months back, I guess, returning to my line detachment at Elbow Vale. As we pulled away from Little Bend — the first stop — the Con' came into the car I was in with a wire in his hand. 'Benton,' he said. 'Anybody here by that name?' I was in mufti — had been on a plain-clothes job. 'Right here!' I said, and opened it up. It was from the O.C., and as far as I can remember, ran something like this: 'Definite information just to hand. Arthur Forbes escaped Badminton Penitentiary; is on No. 13; forty-five; weight, one hundred and ninety; five feet

268 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

ten; thick black eyebrows; hook nose; triangular scar top bald head; dress unknown; search train thoroughly; arrest without fail, signed R. B. Bargrave.'

"It wasn't much of a description to work on, but I realized it was a hurry call and was very likely all the O.C. had been able to get. It was up to me to make good somehow. So I started in to investigate that train with a fine-tooth comb, and I put the Con' wise, too. It's only a short train — the South-bound — and I thought I'd have an easy job locating my man if he was on it. I sauntered casually through, from end to end, and sized all the passengers up. There was only one who came anything near the description I'd had given me. Beggar was a parson at that, too. I passed him up for the time being, and when we stopped at Frampton, I and the Con' made a pretty thorough search of the tender, baggage, and mail coaches — also the rods underneath the whole length of the train. Nothing doing, though, so we got aboard again. Then we ransacked every cubby hole we could think of. Nothing doing again there, either. I began to figure I was up against a hard proposition, or that p'r'aps he wasn't *on* the train at all. But the wire read so positive, and our O.C. isn't the man to send you on a wild goose chase. Besides, I hated to think this gink might slip it over on me after all, and make his get-away.

"Consequence was — I only had this parson to fall back on. I was only two seats back from him, so I could watch him good. He was a big, stout, broad-shouldered chap about the height and weight of the description, all right; clean-shaved and very

pale, with a hook nose and thick black eyebrows, too. Didn't fancy, somehow, that his expression and the cut of his jaw was exactly in keeping with his clerical dress — and his hair — what little I could see of it under his shovel hat — was pretty short. But there! you can't always judge a man by his personal appearance. It isn't wise or fair. Though honestly — I tell you, Miss O'Malley, I *have* seen parsons before now with faces tough enough to get them six months — without the option of a fine — just on sight. I casually moved up to the seat alongside his, on the other side of the aisle, where I could keep good tab on him. He'd got some magazines and two or three clerical papers — *The Pulpit*, *The Clerical Review*, etc., that he seemed very interested in, and I began to think what ridiculous nonsense it was for me ever for an instant to associate *him* in my mind with an escaped convict on the mere coincidence of his answering a vague description. While all this was running in my head something happened which caused me to change my mind a bit and feel kind of uneasy and suspicious of my Reverend 'Nibs.'

"All the way from Frampton, the whole bunch of us in the car — with the exception, of course, of the divine — had been in turn amused and annoyed at the antics of a bleary-eyed-looking bohunk who'd come aboard there with a bottle of 'Seagram's' rye sticking out of his pocket. He'd got a proper singin' jag on, and every now and again he'd pull out his bottle and whet his whistle. Might have been anything from a camp cookee to a section hand out on a 'toot.' I don't know what the beggar was. Anyhow, getting tired of sitting still and singing on

his lonesome, he comes zig-zagging up the aisle, pitching cheerfully into some one's lap at every lurch of the train. The last lap he hit happened to be this parson's, who shoved him off disgustedly, and drew in the hem of his garments, so to speak, all same Phari-see and Publican. The way he did it got that drunk goin' properly — made him pretty nasty. So he gets back at the parson by pulling out his bottle and offering him a drink right then and there. Of course that fetched a great big ignorant laugh out of the whole lot of us, watching this Punch and Judy show. Parson never let on, though — kept his face on one side, staring out of the window. Well, the drunk, seeing his offer of a nip was turned down, takes one himself and, swaying all over the place, puts his hand on the parson's knee and looks up into his face.

" 'Sh-shay, Mister!' he says, as solemn as an owl. 'I don't believe in Heaven!'

"Of course we all started in to grin again, and the parson looked like a proper goat. But still he took no notice — kept as mum as you please, though; I guess if it'd been *me*, that drunk'd have got a back hander across the mouth and kicked off the train by the Con' at the next station.

"Beggar got tickled with the fun he was causing, and he kept on repeating this conviction of his over and over again like a parrot; but, as the parson took not a bit of notice, he shut up for a bit and dozed off to sleep — much to our relief. We were getting a bit fed up with him. Then it was 'Mister' Parson made a darned bad break. He began fumbling in his pockets for something — a penknife, if I remember — to cut the leaves of a magazine. Well, his

gloves seemed to hamper him, so he took them off and I got a good look at his hands. They — like his mug — didn't fit in with his dress at all. Pretty rough-looking mitts, that it was very evident had recently done heavy manual work — all grimed up, with black broken nails and hard callosities on the palms.

"Still I hung fire — for *his* cloth always demands a certain amount of respect. He *might* have been working in his garden, I argued to myself. I didn't want to make any fool break by humiliating a, p'r'aps, perfectly innocent man and a gentleman on mere suspicion, and without any positive proof. While I was twisting things over in my mind, the brakeman came through, calling: 'Baker's Lake! Baker's Lake!' And presently the train began to slow down. Parson began to gather all his belongings together as if he was going to get off there. I was 'between the devil and the deep sea' — properly. For it was a case of 'Going! going!' and the next minute it'd be 'Gone!' with me, p'r'aps, for the goat instead of him.

"But just then Providence, in the shape of the drunk, settled all my doubts for me at the eleventh hour. The brakeman calling out the name of the station, and the parson rustling around with his traps, had combined to wake this beggar up, and he started in to sing again. He quite brightened up at the sound of his own music — takes another swig at his bottle and, squinting at our reverend friend, starts in again with his old parrot squawk:

"*'I don't believe in Heaven, mister! I don't believe in Heaven!'*

"Parson stands up and reaches for his bag off the rack.

" 'Don't you?' he says, showing his teeth in a nasty sort of grin. 'Don't you? Well, then — you can go to H—l!'

"That fixed it — absolutely. I jumped up and followed my 'wolf in sheep's clothing' down the aisle and out onto the platform.

" 'Just a minute, please,' I said. 'I'm a sergeant of the Mounted Police. I don't think there's any doubt about *you*.' And I collared him.

"For answer, he dropped his bag on the instant and closed with me — desperate — tried to trip me up. Oh, I tell you, he sure *was* some handful. Well, he wouldn't give in, quiet, and I began to get mad at the way he was scuffling with me, so I let go of him and broke away for a second. Then I came in on him quick and flopped him out with an uppercut and a back-heel — and as he keeled over his hat flew off and I saw the scar on the top of his bald block. Regular entertainment for the people on the train and the platform. They were wondering what the deuce was up when they saw us scrapping and rolling around there. I shoved the steels on him and took him back next train."

Mary laughed heartily at the conclusion of this episode.

"Wherever had he got the parson's clothes from?" she queried.

"Oh," said Ellis, with a grin, "when I landed back to the Post with him I heard the city police'd received a report from the Reverend Seccombe —

the Baptist minister — to the effect that his house had been broken into the night before and some of his clothes pinched. We got him to come down to the guardroom right away, and he immediately identified the clothes the prisoner was wearing as his — and the bag, too. He and the other gink were just about the same build and height. Oh, his understudy pleaded guilty to burgling this house then and there, when he saw a bluff wouldn't go. Made a statement and told us the whole business.

"It appears he'd broken into a shack when he first made his get-away from the 'pen,' and stolen some workman's clothes. He was kind enough to leave these behind him when he exchanged with Seccombe. Oh, he sure was some 'Holy Roller,' this Mr. Arthur Forbes. *Just* such another flim-flammer as that Jabez Balfour, who put that smooth 'Liberator' 'gold brick come-on' over a lot of the smug Non-conformist fraternity in the Old Country many years back, and then skipped out to Buenos Ayres. This beauty was doing eight years for a somewhat similar fake — a big oil well 'salting' swindle. He'd defrauded the public out of something like four hundred thousand dollars."

He rolled and lit a cigarette and, after carefully extinguishing the match, gazed dreamily awhile across at the mountains, behind which the sun was gradually disappearing. Presently, looking up at his companion with a faint, whimsical smile playing over his stern features, he said quietly:

"Now it's *your* turn to be Scherazerade. So far, I've been in the rôle of Sinbad — completely mo-

nopolizing this 'Arabian Nights' entertainment in a very one-sided manner. Won't you tell me something of *your* life — in return?"

She shrugged her broad, gracefully rounded shoulders with a queer little hopeless gesture, all the life seeming to have gone suddenly out of her mobile face as she regarded him now with grave introspection.

"I'll tell you a little," she said slowly. "But I'm afraid you won't find it very interesting."

What she related was a very fair corroboration of the facts previously told him by Trainor; and though in their narration she strove to appear indifferent to the changing fortunes of her family, and to gloss over her father's improvidence and selfishness, reading between the lines it was very apparent to Ellis what sacrifices she had made willingly for those same young brothers of whom she spoke with such loving solicitude.

"So ye see, me frind," she wound up with a kind of forced gaiety:

*Fawat ups an' down an' changes there be
E'en in the lives av th' loikes av me.*

Four years ago the fortunes av the House of O'Malley were in the ascendant; today they are shtrictly on th' wane."

She threw up her head and smiled gamely in a forlorn sort of way; but the quivering lips belied the careless, inconsequent tones, and he, guessing that the tears were not far from the surface, dimly sensed something of the bitter struggle that that brave heart must have been forced to make at times to keep up

appearances in past periods of adversity. With this in his mind, he impulsively held up his hand to the girl, and she, choking back a little sob in her throat, reached out and clasped it warmly in hers.

"Eyah!" he said; "I guess we've both had our ups and downs, all right, but there's one consolation about our respective lots — they might have fallen in worse places, though there's little *real* peace in the lives of us who are comparatively poor and have to earn our own livings forever dependent on the whims and fancies of the powers that be, set in authority above us.

"Take the life of the average non-com, or 'buck,' in this Force, for instance. It may seem rot to get harping on grievances at such a time and place as this, I know," (he made a sweeping gesture to the landscape with outflung arm) "but there's no lasting peace of mind or future in it. People see us patrolling around in a smart uniform, and riding the pick of the country in horseflesh, thinking, I suppose, what a fine time we have of it. They little guess it's one continual round of worry and trouble. All the way from murder and robbery to settling neighbors' trivial squabbles over dogging each other's cattle, paying the cost of divisional fences, and all those kind of petty disturbances. Either that, or being chased around from one detachment to another, though in that respect I must say this Division isn't as bad as some of 'em. Couldn't have a better O.C. or Inspectors'n we've got in L. As long as you're onto your job and do your work right, they let you pretty well alone. But it's the confounded office work that we have to do in addition to our

ordinary police duty that *we* get fed up on. Talk about red tape! This outfit's sure the home of it! Every report, every little voucher for p'r'aps fifty cents' expenditure — four, and sometimes five, copies of each. Statistics for this, and statistics for that; monthly returns, mileage reports, and the copy of your daily diary. Oh, Lord! you should just see what we have to get through. Most of us use typewriters, of course, or we'd *never* make the grade at all. It's much easier and handier. Guess you saw that one of mine in the detachment.

"Office work or not, though, this job's away ahead of being stuck in the Post. The daily round of a 'straight duty buck' doing prisoners' escort about Barracks is, without doubt, *the* most demoralizing existence goin'. The monotony's something fierce. And a non-com's isn't much better, either. Sent out on every little rotten job that turns up, hanging around stables and the orderly-room, always expected to be on hand and within call. Taking charge of grousing fatigue parties, etc. Thank goodness! I never had much of it to do. I was only in the Post a month when I first took on. Been on detachment ever since, barring six weeks I once put in as Acting Provo' in charge of the guardroom, while Hopgood was sick."

He rolled another cigarette and, inhaling and expelling a whiff of smoke, continued reflectively: "This is a good outfit — this Force — no doubt about it. I guess as regards its system, discipline, and results, it's out and away the best Military Police Force in the world — with the exception, p'r'aps, of the Royal Irish Constabulary. Good

men take on and serve their time. Some reengage, and some quit. But just as good men take their place and the work goes on. But, as I said before, there's no rest, or future in it for the average non-com, or buck. You never know when your day's work's done.

"No, it's just one continual round of listening to, and settling other people's troubles. Seems nonsense, I know, to get talking like this for, after all, it's only what we're paid for. Somebody's got to do it. But there it is — trouble, trouble, trouble, the whole time. All my life, with the exception of the time I deliberately struck into the fighting game, I've wanted to live peaceably; but it seems to have been my luck, somehow, to always get the reverse. Especially on this job. No matter how quiet and easy-going you try to rub along there are always some nasty, bullying, ignorant, cunning beggars who, just because you're a bit decent to them, take it for granted you're easy and try to impose on you. Anyway, that was *my* experience on the first two or three detachments I struck. Not on *this* one, though! Didn't give 'em a chance. Fellow that was before me, corporal named Williamson — decent head, all right — but he tried that 'live, and let live' stunt and it didn't work a bit. No, *sir!* They just took advantage of him every turn and corner. Oh, I tell you, Miss O'Malley, it sure was some tough district — this — when I took it over."

His brows contracted loweringly, and a menacing light gleamed in his deep-set eyes.

"I soaked it to 'em, though, the dirty dogs!" he muttered, with a savage snap of his strong white

teeth. "They wanted to be *shown*. . . . I've sure *shown* some of 'em, all right. The inside of a 'Pen', at that. Kept 'em on the high jump ever since. It's the only way *to* deal with that class. Treat 'em like the scum they are, and they'll be good then and eat out of your hand. They're too ignorant and cunning to appreciate any civility or kindness."

He smoked thoughtfully on awhile after this slight outburst of bitterness, amidst a silence that was presently broken by Mary.

"You're fond of reading, aren't you?" she inquired. "And music?"

His moody face cleared instantly, like the sun coming from behind a cloud.

"Aye! you just bet I am!" he said fervently. "I've read, and played, and sung every chance I've got — wherever I've been. Fond! — well, I should say I am. I fancy if it hadn't been for *that*, I'd have gone to the devil long ago."

He was sitting up on the grass, with his elbows on his knees and his face buried in his hands. Neither of them spoke for a time and he, still gazing across at the distant "Rockies," muttered, half unconsciously, to himself:

"No, just *peace* — that's all I feel I want now. To have some steady job to work at, with a future, and a home ahead of it. Neither molesting, or being molested by any one."

The girl leaned forward, listening wonderingly, as she watched the hard, clean-cut profile of his far-away, moody face, surprised to hear him ramble on so. He appeared to be entirely oblivious of her

presence. He made a very long pause and then, when she thought he was thinking of something quite different, he suddenly said:

"I'm getting older now, and I've got more patience than I used to have but, all the same — I'll take no abuse, back-lip, or stand for being imposed upon by any man. It's been a word and a blow with me all my life, and I guess that's the reason why I'm only a poor man today. For many's the jackpot it's landed me into. Aye! and many's the good job I've had to quit through the same thing.

"Just *peace!*" he repeated again, dreamily. "You realize it in some of George Eliot's tales of old-fashioned English country life, in Gray's 'Elegy,' in Marie Corelli's song of 'The Lotus Lily.' Ah, yes! *she* felt it when she wrote that beautiful thing in her Egyptian tale of 'Ziska':

*"Oh, for the passionless peace of the Lotus-Lily!
It floats in a waking dream on the waters chilly,
With its leaves unfurled
To the wondering world,
Knowing naught of the sorrow and restless pain
That burns and tortures the human brain;
Oh, for the passionless peace of the Lotus-Lily!"*

He ceased, and sunk his face in his hands again. The breeze stirred the grizzled-brown hair on his temples, and he remained still for so long that she thought he had fallen asleep; but presently he seemed to rouse himself a little, and said idly, in a low voice:

"Men like me don't *have* to care what people say, or think, about us. Ever since Mother died, I've been practically alone in the world, and steered

my course as I saw fit — just gone ahead and done what I thought was right. Am I the worse man for being poor, I wonder? I've never crawled to hold a job — or for money, anyway! Badly though I've always wanted it. For it makes all the difference in the world — money. I've kept my self-respect as far as *that* goes — poor consolation though it may be now — just when I need it most."

The girl flicked him with her quirt.

"Don't you think we'd better be going?" she said gently. "It's getting late. The sun's gone down a long time now."

At the touch, and the sound of her voice, he roused himself with a start and regarded her absently.

"By George!" he muttered. "I must have been dreaming. Sorry, Miss O'Malley." He pulled out his watch. "Sure *is* late," he said. "Why didn't you give me a good slap and wake me up before? Letting me go to sleep like that. Well, I guess we'll toddle on down to the horses."

"You *haven't* been asleep," she said, with a faint smile. "But you've been sitting there talking away to yourself like a man in a dream."

He flushed, and laughed a little, shamefacedly.

"Have I?" he answered. "I sure must be getting as 'nuttty' as a sheep herder! What was I talking about?"

"Oh, all sorts of things," she said evasively. "I'll tell you sometime."

He laughed again and, after eyeing her incredulously for an instant, turned and strode down the declivity to where the patient horses still waited.

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 281

The girl gazed wistfully for a moment or two after his retreating form, with its slim waist and square, splendidly-drilled shoulders; then, with a little weary sigh, she arose and, mechanically putting on her hat and dusting her dress, followed him.

Catching up Johnny, who nickered at her approach and picked up his forefoot for sugar, she mounted with the lithe agility of the expert horsewoman. Ellis swung up on Billy, and in silence they set out at a brisk lope for home.

CHAPTER XIX

*For, immune from scoff of bachelor chum,
Into his kingdom he had come;
A rose-strewn path he would henceforth tread
Through the generous will of the kindly dead.*

THE LEGATEE

GO on! you're only fooling! Is that straight now, Hop? What pipe-dream's all this?"

Dr. Musgrave's incredulous remarks were addressed to Provost-Sergeant Hopgood, the non-com. in charge of the guardroom, who, reclining in an easy chair in the former's combined study and consulting-room on this September evening, was regarding his host somewhat lugubriously through a blue haze of cigar smoke.

"No pipe-dream at all . . . kind of wish it was," he answered, with a slight trace of bitterness in his tones. "'Twas Churchill wised *me* up. He was in from Sabbano today. Appears Ben's been rushing this girl — or woman, I should say — she's near thirty, I understand — for quite a time, now."

Musgrave's air of surprise was slowly succeeded by one of unwilling conviction.

"Well, I'll be ——!" he muttered. "I might have tumbled, too!"

"Why, what's up?" said Hopgood eagerly, staring at him now with wide-eyed wonder. "You

knew about it all the time, eh? Did Ben tell you? Have you seen her? What's she like?"

Musgrave knocked the ash off his cigar and gazed reflectively out of the open window.

"Think I have," he said. "I was walking down Eighth Avenue with him — day he was in town, last month. 'Hello!' he says, pulling up suddenly. 'Here's somebody I know from my district!' And, in that happy, casual, easy way he's got, he introduced me to a female acquaintance of his, who'd just come out of Black's jewelry store. She was a great big tall dark girl — finest figure of a woman I think I've ever seen. Regular whopper — not fat with it, either. Made you think of Boadicea, or Britannia, somehow, to look at her. She didn't strike me as being a beauty, exactly, but she'd got a nice kind face. Lots of fun in her, too, and a lady, unmistakably. I rather liked her. We stood there chatting a few minutes, and I remember she told me she was in town for a day or two, shopping. Never a peep from that old fox, Ben, though. You'd never have dreamt there was anything doing from the way he acted then. Everything was as casual as you please. Begad! I'll soak it to him for putting it over on me like this! That's if it *is* right," he added, with a dubious smile. "Somehow, I can't credit it, though. Why, he's the very last man I'd have expected to go dangling after a woman!"

"Bet he don't do much dangling," remarked the Provost sagely. "Not if I know him. He ain't that kind. More'n likely it's the other way round. I've known quite a few women get struck on him. Queer beggar! he's never aloof, rude, or cold, but

somehow — he just doesn't seem to *notice* 'em at all. P'r'aps that's what gets 'em. Besides, he's a proper man to look at, and when he's penned in a corner with a woman with no chance of escape, he talks in that kind, simple way of his — you know his way, Charley."

Musgrave nodded.

There was a long silence, the two men puffing thoughtfully at their cigars and gazing with owlish abstraction at each other.

"Didn't you tell me once that he was engaged to some girl in Jo'burg? When he was with the Chartered Company?" pursued Hopgood.

"Yes," answered Musgrave moodily, "he was." He paused, and an unfathomable, far-away look crept into his eyes as he gazed absently across at a window in the opposite block that the last rays of the dying sun transformed into a flaming shield of fire. "Beautiful Irish girl named Eileen Regan. She'd a face like a Madonna, I remember. She was a Roman Catholic, and a very devout one at that. They *might* have been happy together . . . I don't know. It's hard to predict how these mixed religions'll turn out. Poor things never got the chance to see, anyway. For she died — died of enteric, just before the war started."

Hopgood eyed the other tentatively for a second or two. "*This* one's Irish, too, I understand?" he remarked. "Irish-American, anyway. . . . He seems mighty partial to the Irish. Her name's O'Malley. They'll be able to keep a pig and 'live pretty,' what?"

And, overcome by the thought, he made a comical

grimace of despair and sank back into the depths of his luxurious chair, while the roar of the busy street below floated up to their ears.

Musgrave cleared his throat. "Mother was an Irishwoman," he said presently. "Probably that accounts for it. She was a Miss FitzGerald, of Dublin — sister of that brave, splendid chap, Captain FitzGerald, who was killed along with poor Fred Burnaby and many others of Stewart's column, when the square was broken in the fight near the wells at Abou Klea, in the Soudan War of 'eighty-four and five."

He smoked on silently for a space. "Oh, h—ll!" he burst out, with a sudden incredulous bitterness that startled even the cynical Hopgood. "Why, that beggar's *always* come to me before with his troubles. Guess I'm the only one he ever *does* confide in. Many's the time I've acted as Father-confessor and mentor to him. Surely he'd never have passed me up in such a momentous business as this? What saith the poet:

*"You may carve it on his tombstone,
You may cut it on his card
That a young man married is a young man marred."*

The Provost emitted a noisy, snorting laugh.

"Yes," he remarked, with the jeering familiarity of old acquaintance, "and I must say you're a nice blooming old Gamaliel to act as mentor to anybody, Charley, especially if you expect him to embrace *your* self-constituted creed of morality and philosophy. Oh, you're some Father-confessor, all right, what? Besides, he *ain't* young. That is, unless you

call thirty-nine unsophisticated youth. 'Bout time he *was* making the break. There's no fun in getting married when you're old, all same Pope's 'January and May.' He happened to mention it was his birthday to a bunch of us down town when he came in last month. I remember him saying it was his thirty-ninth, because I and Berkley, Mac, and Port stuck him for the drinks on the strength of it. We rushed him into the Alberta bar right away and —"

"How about the way he used to hand it out about non-coms and bucks getting married in your Force, too?" interrupted Musgrave, grinning. "'Look at Beckstall,' he would say. 'Look at Corbett,' and lots of others. 'Big families — always broke — dragging out their miserable lives in rotten little line detachments — can never afford to send their poor wives away for a change anywhere — they don't *live* — they just *exist*, from one year's end to another. That's all there's to it! D'you think I'd let myself in for a purgatory like *that*?' and so on. You've heard him, Hop, too — lots of times, what?"

Hopgood held up his hands appealingly.

"Don't shoot, Colonel!" he said. "I'll come down! *I'm* not holding any particular brief for him. Guess he's pretty well able to conduct his own defense. *Ish ga bibble!* — it ain't *our* funeral."

It was worse than useless to argue with Musgrave. All his opponent's best hits were turned aside by the target of his cynicism and unbelief, while his repartee and sarcasms often came home.

"Funny chap!" he resumed musingly. "I think he is just about *the* most interesting and complex character I've ever come across. He's very much

of a man, but at the same time — he's as simple as a kid in some things. Beggar reads a lot, and he's as rum in his tastes in that as he is in everything else. Fond of all this old-fashioned stuff. The heighth of his imagination in humor he finds in Balzac's and Rabelais' yarns, or Boccaccio's "Decameron," and his ideals of pathos in George Eliot's or Dickens's tales. Whatever can you do with a man like that? "

"Oh, what's the use of talking?" broke out Hopgood testily:

"A fool there was, and he made his prayer —"

he quoted, with a low, bitter laugh. "And by gum! it's me that knows it."

The doctor silently eyed him in cynical abstraction awhile after this outburst, then his grim mouth relaxed into a faint sympathetic grin, and he held out his hand.

"Aye! . . . 'Even as you and I,' " he finished softly. "Shake! . . . Is *that* why you chucked up your commission in India? . . . I and Ben always thought so," he continued, as the Provost nodded wearily to his query. "None of our business to get making inquisitions, though. . . . Well! this sad news has been quite a shock to our nervous systems. Kind of breaks up us 'Three Musketeers,' eh? . . . Looks very much as if we're going to lose our D'Artagnan. The old chum of your bachelor days is, somehow, never the same again to you after he gets married. S'pose an all-wise Providence has ordained things so for some unfathomable reason. Think we need a little drink to console us."

288 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

And he got up with a dreary sighing yawn and, unlocking a small mahogany liquor cellaret, produced a splendid silver and cut-glass "Tantalus."

"What's yours, Hop?" he inquired. "Brandy, or 'Scotch'?"

Leaving these two well-meaning, if cynical, worthies to console each other with the bitter philosophy which retrospection of past irremedial misfortunes has caused many better, and worse, men than them to revert to, let us return to the detachment at Cherry Creek, where at this particular moment the object of their commiseration is leaning back in his favorite chair, with his head resting in its customary position against the leopard-skin kaross. Tired out by a long and uneventful four days' patrol, Ellis lit a pipe and gazed wearily out through the open door into the gathering dusk. Gradually, his mind, still obsessed with the vague memories of brands of missing cattle and horses and the usual round of more or less petty complaints, strayed back to the Trainors' establishment.

He found himself wondering how Mary was, and what had caused her to be so strangely silent and abstracted during that last homeward ride together from Lone Butte. At supper time, too, he mused, she had been in the same mood . . . had hardly spoken to him at all? Could it be that —?

And, not unmixed with an unfamiliar, slightly self-conscious, feeling of shame, came the sudden thought that she *might* have grown to regard his attentions in a more serious light than mere frank camaraderie. And, if that was so — well — she sure *must* be

thinking him a proper "laggard in love." Not much of the "Young Lochinvar" about him, he reflected bitterly. Anyway, it certainly didn't seem very gentlemanly behavior on his part, or the right thing, exactly, to run around after a girl — like he undoubtedly had, to a certain extent — with Mary, and then keep her "hanging on the fence" indefinitely, as it were, like that. Surely the Trainors must be wondering not a little, too. How the deuce was it that he had never thought of his conduct in that light before? What a simple fool he had been not to have "tumbled" to all this earlier? Should he chance it? She could but "turn him down" like she had the rest — some of whose very palpable discomfiture he had been a casual and not altogether disinterested witness on more than one occasion.

And then, on the other hand, was he *justified* in asking *any* woman to share the lot that he had so often bitterly inveighed against as being utterly insufficient, unsuitable, and contrary to all his ideals of conjugal happiness?

His somewhat gloomy reflections were suddenly disturbed by the sounds of an approaching rider, who presently drew up outside the open door.

"Oh, Sargint!" came the gruff bark of Gallagher; "yu're back, eh? Bin down for me mail, so I brung yores along."

"Good man! much obliged. Come on in, Barney!" Ellis called out.

And the rancher, swinging down from the saddle, dropped his lines and slouched in with a packet of letters in his hand.

"Nothin' doin', an' nobody around for yu' while

yu' was away," he remarked, dropping into a chair and lighting his pipe. "Gosh, but it's a warm night for this time o' year!"

The Sergeant reached out for, and began leisurely to open up his mail. Most of it bore the regimental stamp of L Division. Returned crime reports, with caustic, blue-pencilled marginal comments in the O.C.'s caligraphy, requesting certain omitted particulars therein. Circulars respecting stolen stock, descriptions of persons "wanted" for various crimes, drastic orders emanating, primarily, from Headquarters at Regina, regarding new innovations to be observed in certain phases of detachment duty, etc., the monthly "General Orders," and so on. But presently a somewhat large envelope, addressed in a clerk's hand and bearing an English stamp and the London postmark, attracted his attention. Whoever could be writing *him* from the Old Country? he wondered. The only letters he ever received from *there* were mostly from Major Carlton, and this wasn't *his* handwriting.

With a vague feeling of uneasiness, he turned it over in his hand irresolutely for a moment, then opened it. It contained a closed envelope and a letter which bore the heading of a London legal firm. Mechanically he smoothed this latter communication out and began to read the epoch-making document that was destined later to create for him a new world and to transform his desert into a paradise.

Dear Sir,—We are charged with the melancholy duty of breaking to you the news of the death of your old friend, Major Gilbert Carlton, on the 20th ult. Our late respected client, although possessing all the outward appearances of

being a hale, robust old soldier, had for many years suffered from what physicians term an "aortic aneurism," the origin of which was probably the result of the privations and exposure endured by him in the various campaigns that he had gone through. The final bursting of this "aneurism" was the cause of his sudden death.

Suffering from such an ailment, it is therefore not surprising that he apparently realized of late that his end might come upon him unexpectedly at any moment of his advanced age. This presentiment he recently confided to us, during one of his last business visits. The enclosed letter he left in our care, charging us — in case of his decease — to forward it immediately to you.

For many years he frequently spoke of you to us with great regard and feeling; referring to you always, as "The boy, Ellis," or "*His* boy," in tones which moved us not a little, evincing as he did, such a kindly love and esteem for you. He was seventy-five years of age, and, as you are of course aware, a bachelor all his life, possessing only distant relatives. Although not by any means a recluse, and enjoying life to its full in his old-fashioned, cheery way at his estate — Biddlecombe Hall, in Devonshire, surrounded by many of his old soldier friends — he was not an extravagant man and the revenues of the said estate have been steadily accumulating for many years. This magnificent property, with all revenues thereof had been left to him under the will of his cousin, the late Lord Baring, his nearest relative.

We enclose a copy of the testament, by which you will see that (with the exception of the estate, which, re a stipulated clause in Lord Baring's will, has reverted at the death of the last incumbent to the Morley Institute, to be used as a sanatorium for tuberculosis patients, and a few bequests to old servants) he has bequeathed to you the great bulk of his money. We hold at your disposal, a sum (discounting probate dues) approximately nearly ninety thousand pounds.

We beg to congratulate you on the acquisition of this con-

292 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

siderable fortune. Thinking that you might desire to relinquish your present occupation at once, and not knowing how you are financially situated, we enclose a credit for five hundred pounds, for which please sign the accompanying receipt. Kindly communicate with us at your earliest convenience.

We are, dear sir, yours truly,
EATON AND SMITH.

Dazedly Ellis glanced through the attached copy of the will and reread the letter through. Gallagher, who had been intently watching his face throughout, vaguely aware from the Sergeant's unconcealed agitation that some tidings of an unusual character had been received, inquired casually:

"Why, what's up, Sargint? Hope yu' ain't bin a-gettin' bad news?"

Ellis regarded his interlocutor absently a moment or two, and then his preoccupied gaze flickered away again through the open door into the darkness of the night.

"It's both good *and* bad, Barney," he answered slowly. "I'll tell yu'—later."

Choking back many conflicting emotions, he now picked up the previously mentioned closed letter which, he perceived, was addressed to him in his old friend's handwriting. With a feeling almost of awed reverence, he broke the heavy wax seal, stamped with the Major's own signet ring and, drawing out the letter, began to read a communication that was to remain indelibly in his memory forever:

My Dear Lad,—I take up my pen to write this—the last letter you will ever receive from me—while I am still of

BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED 293

clear mind, and in possession of all my faculties. Life is very uncertain at all times, and especially so in the case of an old fellow like me. I have got what the doctors call an "aneurism," Ellis, and have had it for many years now. A man cannot expect to come through the hardships of such campaigns as the Afghan and Soudan, unscathed. I was at Charasiah, Kabul, Maiwand, and Tel-el-Kebir, my boy, and I tell you I have worked, bled, starved and suffered above a bit in my time. My incubus has been troubling me greatly of late and I cannot mistake its meaning. Dr. Forsyth has warned me that it may burst at any time now. Many thanks for granting my wish in sending me that photograph of yourself in your Mounted Police uniform. I look at it often. For though externally it depicts one whom I believe to be a soldier, and a man in word, deed, and appearance, in it I seem to see again the face of a boy that I once loved, because — he had his mother's dear, dear eyes.

Yes, Ellis, my lad! . . . Now that I know my end is not far off, I feel that I cannot die peaceably without telling you what has been to me a sacred secret since I was in my thirties.

It must have been in 'sixty-two, or thereabouts, when I first met your mother, in Dublin. The regiment that I and your father were in lay at Athlone, then. I grew to love her. Loved her with a passion that I fancy comes to few men, and my supreme desire was to be able to call her my wife. I suppose the Almighty willed it otherwise, though, and it was not to be. . . . For John Benton, your father, came along, my boy, and he was a big man, and a strong man, and a handsome man, with a bold masterful, loving way with him that took her by storm, as it were, and I — I faded into insignificance beside such a splendid personality as his. He won her from me, but that fact could not kill my love; all outward exhibition of which, though, I have guarded well. I have worn the willow decently, I hope, as an honest English gentleman should, and have borne my cross patiently through the long, weary years that have passed since then.

294 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

With the recollection of *such* a woman as your mother lingering still in my remembrance,— whose dear face — God grant, I may behold again, shortly — can you wonder that none other has come into my life to take her place, and that I have been true to the memory of my first, and only love. You alone of your family have *her* eyes, and impulsive, loving ways, and for those reasons were always my favorite — headstrong lad, though you were.

On the subject of your estrangement from your family, I have nothing to say, beyond that I consider that it is a matter which lies entirely between your own conscience — and God. You were sorely tried, I know.

I am leaving to you the greater portion of my money. It is my desire, as through it, I hope, your future path in life will be smoothed considerably. May it ultimately bring you the happiness of enabling you to marry a good, true, loving woman, and of living henceforth, in that station of life to which you properly belong.

Do not grieve for me my lad! . . . Best think of me just as a kindly old soldier, at the end of his service, who was ready and willing to go to his rest — only awaiting “The Last Post” to be sounded. I have not lived altogether unhappily. I have drunk deeply of the joys of life in my time, and I possess many good and true friends. My days, thank God, have been, for the most part, passed cleanly as a *man* — in the open, breathing His fresh air. Through it I have had ever your dear mother’s memory to keep my conscience clear, and have striven steadfastly to adhere and live up to, most all, I trust, of the precepts that are embodied in the formula, “An officer, and a gentleman.” As in the sunset of my life I sit alone in my chair in the twilight, dreaming of bygone days, it seems to me that I can see the shining welcome of many long-lost and well-remembered faces. They come and go, and I love them well enough, but *one* — especially beloved above the rest is with me always.

But why speak of *her*? . . . Now that she is again so

near to me—now that I go, I hope, where *she* has gone! . . . The guiding-light of the soul of her true womanhood is shining brighter and brighter in the gloom ahead of me still, and of *her* will my last thoughts be on this side of Eternity.

And now! . . . Ellis, my boy! my boy! . . . One last "Good-by!". . . God bless you, and may your life be a long and happy one.

I am, believe me, to the last.

Your old friend,
GILBERT CARLTON.

A smothered sob burst from Ellis, and the letter fluttered from his grasp to the floor. Gallagher, still watching him curiously, repeated his former query:

"What's up, Sargint? Hope nothin's —"

Ellis interrupted him huskily, but not unkindly.

"Get out, Barney!" he said. "Don't talk to me just now! I'll tell yu'—sometime! Beat it! there's a good chap. I just wanta be alone."

And, with one last lingering look of silent, wondering sympathy, the rancher arose and departed slowly into the night.

Overcome with his thoughts, Ellis sat for a long time motionless; then, mechanically groping for the letter again, he reread it. Its simple pathos touched him strangely as the awe-inspiring significance of the long, patient struggle of that faithful old heart—stilled now, alas, forever—began to creep into his dazed brain. He raised his swimming eyes to the portrait of the gentle woman, the memory of whose beauty and kind, sweet personality had been the good angel alike to poor old Major Carlton and

himself throughout both their strenuous and sin-tempted lives.

Not in vain had been her early teachings and loving, self-sacrificing patience and forbearance, while he was yet a wilful, headstrong youngster. As, gently, and with a mother's tact, she strove to curb his faults and instil into him — through love, and love alone — truth, honesty, and the main principles of right and wrong.

Not in vain had she entered into her rest and, as an angel in the stead of a beautiful, pure, true-hearted woman, interceded for the souls of both men in their tempestuous journey through life.

Long and wistfully the Sergeant gazed into the grave, sweet eyes and proud, clean-cut features — so like his own — and his stern bronzed face became softened and glorified with a wave of ineffable filial devotion too sacred for words.

"Mother!" he whispered brokenly. "Mother! Oh, Mother!" and dropped his head upon his outstretched arms across the table.

But grief — no matter however sincere and true — to the average healthy man is but a transient emotion. Ellis was no dissembler, and sadly though he mourned the loss of his old friend, as the first transports of his sorrow subsided and he became calmer, a slow, dim realization of the tremendous possibilities of his good fortune began to flood his mind.

For to him it meant — freedom, at last, from all the unavoidable, petty, sordid worries connected with the calling that he followed. No more gloomy outlooks upon life in general, or pessimistic fore-

bodings arising from the consciousness of straightened means. Free at last to wander around the earth at will and visit all its beauty spots that he had read or heard about. Free to enjoy all the pleasures of the world that money can command. He was still only a comparatively young man, strong and active far beyond the average.

And, above all, it meant — and the very thought of his presumption stirred him strangely and caused a mighty wave of long-pent-up love to surge through his heart — perhaps also it meant — Mary.

So the joy of life filled him and transfigured his scarred, somber face with a dreamy expression of happiness that lies beyond the power of mere words to adequately describe. No more was the ideal life that he had so often — ah! how often? — pictured longingly to himself in his fits of morbid, spiritless depression, only a monotonous repetition of hopeless empty dreams. It actually lay now within his power to gratify his heart's desires to their fullest extent.

And then — to the weary man in that humble abode, which was, nevertheless, all that he could call "Home," there appeared a wondrous fantasy which, in its awe-inspiring, majestic grandeur, might have been likened, almost, unto some allegory, or a scene in the Revelation. With mind absolutely, utterly detached from all things material, he sat there motionless, as if in a dream, and it began to float before his far-away eyes like a filmy roseate mirage.

For, in his exalted imagination, it seemed to him that he was standing upon the shores of a great sparkling crystal sea, as it were, in the first faint

298 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

flush of a radiant dawn. Purple, crimson, saffron-yellow, pink, and gray, the morning lights stole in succession across the sleeping world, and slowly — slowly, in the mystic East — the flashing rays of a magnificent sunrise began to creep over the rim of the horizon, transforming the gleaming waste of waters into a vast expanse of golden flame.

And, as he gazed entranced at this gorgeous spectacle, suddenly he grew conscious that he was not alone. Turning, he became aware of the figure of a woman kneeling on the ground hard by, with her head bowed in an attitude suggestive of sorrowful abandon. Her form, though the face was turned from him and partly shrouded by her huge masses of dark, disordered hair, seemed vaguely familiar; and he found himself engaged in idle speculation as to her identity. Something in her posture of dejection instinctively stirred in him a fleeting memory of Thomas Moore's beautiful poem, "Paradise and the Peri," the poor Peri humbly, yet vainly, craving admission into Paradise. Vaguely and disconnectedly, some of the lines wandered into his mind:

*One morn a Peri at the gate
Of Eden stood, disconsolate;*

*The glorious Angel who was keeping
The Gates of Light beheld her weeping;*

Awhile he contemplated the woman with a great pity in his heart, and was about to draw nigh and comfort her when all at once his impulse was checked and he remained spellbound in mute amazement.

For, seemingly from *nowhere*, a transcendently glorious voice — *that sounded not of this earth* —

suddenly arose in the stillness around them. Pure, peaceful, unutterably sweet, far beyond this world and its works, the golden notes floated forth into the hush of the opal dawn, uplifting the hearts of the listeners on the wings of sound — verily to Heaven's gate:

*"O Rest in the Lord! wait patiently for Him!
And He shall give thee — He shall give thee —
O He shall give thee thy heart's desire!"*

The eternal solace of the weary and heavy-laden, the Divine appeal to all poor struggling souls rose and fell, finally melting away into nothingness, save where the deep, cloister-like silence flung back a faint far echo. Beside the bowed female figure there became visible a vague shimmering *something* which, almost imperceptibly, began to assume the outlines of a human form. Disturbed strangely at what he knew not, the wayward, reckless soul of Ellis Benton became filled with a great and reverential awe.

He sank to his knees and bowed his head. When, fearfully, he dared to raise it again, his eyes beheld *one* clad in shining raiment, about whom there clung a halo of radiance. Slowly the glistening form turned and a cry of wonderment and adoration burst from his lips. For, lo! — it seemed to him that *once more* he looked upon the face of his long-dead love — Eileen Regan.

Motionless, she gazed down upon him long and earnestly, with gravely sweet, kind eyes; then, stooping low, she embraced the sorrowing woman tenderly, and kissed her on the brow, bidding her be of good cheer and calling her "Sister." Presently,

300 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

drawing herself erect, she uplifted her heavenly voice again, and there rang forth — as he well remembered her singing it in *life*, one never-to-be-forgotten Christmas morn, in that little Catholic Church in far-off Johannesburg — “In Excelsis Gloria ”:

*“Glory to God in the Highest!
And on earth peace, goodwill towards men!”*

She bent and kissed the woman a last farewell. Then, raising her arms in holy benediction, she slowly became a *shade*, as before, unfolding her wings and floating away diaphonously into the silvery mists of the early morn.

The kneeling woman then arose and, turning, came towards him swiftly. A tall, stately figure of a woman, with a kind, strong, sweet face; the tumbled masses of her glossy, raven-hued hair all floating and rippling about her regal shoulders and white columnar throat.

Near she drew to him — nearer. She stretched out her bare rounded arms to him with a little happy loving cry as she smiled into his eyes, and he saw the splendor and glory of the world in hers.

While, far away in his ears, rang the echo of his own voice calling upon a woman's name — wonderingly, passionately — “Mary! . . . Mary! . . . Mary! . . .

CHAPTER XX

*The wild hawk to the wind-swept sky,
The deer to the wholesome wold,
And the heart of a man to the heart of a maid
As it was in the days of old.
The heart of a man to the heart of a maid —
Light of my tents, be fleet!
Morning waits at the end of the world;
And the world is all at our feet.*

KIPLING

WAKE up, Johnny, yu' old fool! . . . don't
yu' start in to lazy on me or I'll —"

Here Ellis shrewdly pinched his
mount's withers, causing that animal to flatten his
ears and nip playfully at his rider's knee.

"Look out, doggone it! If I happen to get a
bit absent-minded at times, yu' needn't follow suit!"
he exclaimed sharply, as he jerked his horse away
from the edge of a small, but wicket muskeg, around
which the trail that led to the Trainors' ranch cir-
cled. "I sure don't want to be getting in the soup
like Jim McCloud did that time, on *this* day of all
days. I'll hand yu' over to Mary, begad! . . .
she'll teach yu' to 'soldier,' yu' old sucker!"

It was a glorious sunshiny afternoon, and the
light cool breeze sent the occasional little tufts of
fleecy-white clouds scudding across the turquoise-blue
sky, and waved and brushed the surface of the long
prairie grass as if with an invisible hand. To the
gait of his horse Ellis whistled to himself — hap-
pily — half dreamily, as if he voiced some inner

302 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

thought — an old, long-forgotten air, presently breaking into its words:

*"Sae kind, kind and gentle is she,
Kind is my Mary;
The tender blossom on the tree,
Cannot compare wi' Mary."*

Duly arriving at the ranch, he dropped his lines, and leisurely sauntering up to the familiar dwelling where he perceived the owner and his wife sitting in the shade of the veranda, he hailed them cheerily.

Trainor looked up at the other's approach and, lowering the paper that he was reading, nodded to him nonchalantly; his spouse gave no salutation whatever, and appeared engrossed in her sewing.

Ellis halted irresolutely, sensing something strange and apathetic in the manner in which he was received — something *distant*, as it were — and he became slowly conscious of a presentiment that his forebodings had not been without reason, and that all was not well as heretofore, when their usual welcome had been so genuine and unrestrained. With a feeling of vague uneasiness at his heart, he regarded them blankly a moment or two, glancing from one to the other inquiringly; then he said:

"Is anything the matter? What's wrong?"

Trainor fidgeted nervously in his chair awhile, and then raising his self-conscious eyes to the level of his questioner's breast, blurted out:

"Well, you see, Benton, it's like this . . . er —"

But words seemed to fail him, and he left the sentence unfinished, relapsing into silence and gazing miserably at his wife, as if seeking her assistance

in his explanation. The latter, now for the first time, raised her head and, gravely contemplating the troubled, anxious face of the Sergeant, addressed her husband.

"Best tell him, Dave," she said, with an inflection of slightly frigid hostility in her tones. "If you won't, *I will!*"

Thus adjured, Trainor coughed awkwardly and began afresh:

"Well, now, see here; look! I'll tell you, Sergeant. It's about that girl, Mary — Miss O'Malley, I mean. You know how I and Mrs. Trainor love and regard that girl? . . . known her since she was a little kiddie, and think as much of her as we do of our own children —"

He stopped, and Ellis nodded silently.

"For over a week now," continued the rancher, "that girl's been acting queerly — seems worried — won't talk, and she's not looking at all well. This afternoon we simply couldn't stand it any longer — she was looking miserable, and it made *us* miserable, too, seeing her like that. We were right here on the veranda, and she came out of the door to go riding. I caught hold of her by the shoulders — half joshingly — 'Mary, my dear!' I said; 'what's wrong? You're not looking yourself. There's something the matter — won't you tell us? You're not afraid to tell *us*, are you, my girl?' She struggled a bit when I had her cornered like that, and tried to get away from me — then she raised those beautiful honest eyes of hers and looked me squarely in the face. She tried to speak, but somehow the words wouldn't seem to come, and —"

"And *then*," broke in Mrs. Trainor, taking up the tale, "she flung away from him and threw her arms around my neck and hid her face against my shoulder. You know, Mr. Benton, she's the very soul of honesty . . . candid and unafraid to a degree — she doesn't know what evasion or subterfuge means — she's like a brave, simple child in that respect. She clung to me for a bit, and then she breaks out into that quaint Irish brogue of hers — like she often does when she's agitated or excited:

"'Och! 'tis waithin I am for a man to speak!' she wails out. 'And, oh, my dear! . . . weary waithin 'tis, ochone!' And then she burst out crying, with great shaking sobs — oh! *how* that girl *did* cry — as if her heart was breaking. I talked to her and soothed her the best I could, and by and by she became quieter, dried her eyes, kissed me, and went away to her horse. She didn't say any more than that and I didn't ask her — didn't need to . . . for there! . . . isn't that admission enough? D'you think *we* looking on at this play all this time don't know *who* she meant?" Mrs. Trainor continued, eyeing Benton severely. "Haven't you been coming here regularly, paying her marked attention, taking her out for rides, and all that? D'you think it's possible to deceive *us*. If you've only been amusing yourself at her expense all these months with no serious intentions, I tell you plainly, Mr. Benton . . . I don't think you're acting in a proper manner at all. That girl is one in a thousand. Besides — she has refused many good offers of marriage — and all for your sake, too — from men who were in the position to give her a downright good home and all the com-

forts of life. You may think it's not our business, but I tell you it *is*!" she ended, with sparkling eyes. "And we've made up our minds this sort of thing shan't go on any longer — that is, unless you can give us your positive assurance that your intentions are really sincere. . . . No! you needn't look at me in that idiotic way!" she cried, arising and stamping her foot angrily. "I mean what I say, and I —"

Benton, with a flash of white teeth, and a broad and rather foolish grin on his — now happy — face, suddenly stepped forward and gripped the indignant lady gently by the shoulders.

"Mrs. Trainor!" he said, with a daring earnestness that almost took the breath away from that scandalized dame as she struggled to free herself. "If you open your mouth to say one word more, I'll — as sure as you're the wife of your husband — I'll *kiss* you bang in front of him!" And, releasing her, he continued: "What you've just told me's made me the happiest man alive. . . . I know where I get off at, now . . . and I'll proceed to tell *you* something!"

And rapidly he acquainted the astonished pair with the news of his unexpected good fortune, apologizing for his seemingly callous conduct with a deep, sincere contrition that impressed them in no little degree and dispelled all their lingering doubts.

Trainor reached out a massive hand. "Sergeant," he said, with great feeling. "Shake! I'm in wrong! I take it all back how I've misjudged you! I might have known you weren't *that* kind!"

Ellis, swallowing a little, grasped the offered hand warmly.

"Dave!" he blurted out, "it's *me* that's to blame, all right. It's mighty good of you and Mrs. Trainor to condone that sure questionable simplicity of mine in the way you have. I should have put myself right with both of you at the start."

But Mrs. Trainor outdid her husband in impulsive warmth.

"You threatened to kiss me," she began archly. "Now, I'm going to do more than threaten. There, sir!"

And, suiting the action to the word, she kissed him heartily. Then, womanlike, as the reaction to her happiness — she began to cry. At which Trainor guffawed and caught hold of her teasingly. But, dragging herself away from him, she pushed Ellis towards the path.

"Now you go!" she sobbed, "after her — straightway. And don't you dare bring her back here until you've kissed her tears away and she's her own happy self again. That is, if you can find her," she added, with wet, smiling eyes. "I don't know exactly which way she went."

"Oh, I'll find her, all right," said Ellis cheerfully. "I think I know where she'll be."

And, turning, he strode off to the waiting Johnny, mounted, and set off at a brisk lope towards "Lone Butte," that reared its head in the hazy distance. For it was *there* that he guessed instinctively she had betaken herself.

Purposely making a wide detour to escape her possible observation, thirty minutes' brisk riding brought him into a small coulee, dotted with a young growth of Balm o' Gilead trees and alder bushes, which lay

to the rear of the butte and exactly opposite to the side where the regular path to the summit began. Here he dismounted and, leading Johnny, to save a later descent for that animal, commenced to slowly make the ascent.

Pausing to take breath within a few yards of the top, the breeze brought to his ears the unmistakable sounds of somebody whistling carelessly to herself. Yes, that was her whistle, all right, he reflected; so she couldn't be so *very* unhappy. Intending to steal up to her unobserved, and calculating from his memory of the position of the big stone, that she would have her back turned towards him, he crept warily to the summit.

Soon, not thirty feet distant on the small plateau, he beheld her seated on the stone and, as he had surmised, facing the West. But her attitude of dejected abandon sobered him somewhat, and the low, monotonous whistle sounded doleful in the extreme. Noiselessly the Sergeant decreased the distance between them, and when within a few feet halted, not wishing to startle her too badly. On account of her wide-brimmed Stetson hat tipped back on the nape of her neck, and the breeze blowing in her ears, she had not thus far been aware of his close approach, the thick, "old-bottom" prairie grass effectually deadening the ring of Johnny's steel-shod hoofs.

Long and earnestly, with a great love not unmingled with a pang of remorse in his heart, Ellis gazed on the still unconscious girl. Then all at once he gave a violent start, which almost betrayed his presence to her.

For, suddenly, and with the clarity that the great

308 BENTON OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

king saw the writing on the wall, again he seemed to behold, and comprehend fully now, the significance of the strange fantasy which had appeared to him in the detachment the previous night.

The dreary whistle ceased, and with her chin resting in her hands she began to idly croon to herself an old-fashioned time-worn ballad, which he vaguely recognized as Whittier's "Maud Muller." Lord! what a time it seemed since he'd heard *that!* he reflected. It took him right back to the scenes of his boyhood again at Shrewsbury — peaceful, gray-spired old-world Shrewsbury. Verse by verse, came the monotonous refrain of the antiquated poem to his ears — just as a little girl will sometimes drone to herself as she sits plaiting her hair in the sun:

*Maud Muller looked and sighed: "Ah me!
That I the Judge's bride might be!
He would dress me up in silks so fine,
And praise and toast me at his wine."*

How the air of a long-forgotten song, a chance phrase in a book, the scent of new-mown hay and of certain flowers, the splendor of a tropical sunrise, the glory of a flaming crimson and gold sunset, or the calm beauty of a moonlight night will oftentimes awaken in us strange old longing memories of other — and, perchance — happier days. Harking back now through all the years came to him, dimly, the recollection that the *very last* time he had heard *that* was at a gathering of young hearts held in his old school town, when he was a bright-eyed young sinner of thirteen or thereabouts — "soirees," as they were called then. Yes, it was at Dr. Pennington's, and

saucy, yet tender-eyed, little Darthea Pennington had recited it. She had cried, too, at its conclusion, he remembered; which spectacle of girlish emotion had prompted him to start in tormenting her with some youthful nonsense, in a well-meant effort to revive her natural gaiety. True, she'd slapped his face as the reward for his impudence, but didn't she relent later to the extent of allowing him to kiss "friends," and afterwards take her in to supper?

*"And I'd feed the hungry and clothe the poor,
And all should bless me who left our door."*

*The Judge looked back as he climbed the hill,
And saw Maud Muller standing still.*

With bowed head the listener stood there motionless, whilst a wave of emotion surged through his heart, awakening all the sentiment which, through long years of iron self-repression, had lain dormant in his deep nature.

Whatever had possessed her to hark back to this memory of her girlhood? he mused. Under ordinary circumstances he would no doubt have resorted as heretofore, to his customary badinage — chaffed her about "grinding out Whittier by the yard," or mimicked her in a mincing falsetto. But now — as he heard it *now* — the element of absurdity was distinctly lacking . . . nay! it was pitiful — almost tragic . . . how like a simple child again she seemed, in her unhappiness?

With pathetic, monotonous regularity — as if she were seeking to distract her thoughts from her trouble by repeating some orison — the interminable stanzas rose and fell, with a quavering cadence:

*Then she took up her burden of life again,
Saying only, "It might have been."*

Choking back a lump in his throat, Ellis now dropped his horse's lines and stepped forward.

"Mary!" he called softly.

And, at the sound of his voice the girl, with a slight start and exclamation, turned and looked up at him. With a feeling of deep contrition he remarked her pale, tear-stained face, and the dark shadows under her splendid eyes, denoting mental worry and sleepless nights. Her first surprise over, she settled listlessly back again to her old dejected attitude, but never taking her great weary eyes off his face. Never a word had she uttered yet, but continued to gaze silently on the man before her with a forlorn, wistful expression that cut him to the very heart. Suddenly she began to speak, but her voice seemed to ring strangely lifeless and far away in his ears.

"Oh! . . . and are you back again?" came the toneless accents, "to mock me with that handsome, cold face of yours? I was happy enough till *you* came into my life . . . you who've laid yourself out to make me love you — for nothing, p'r'aps, except your own amusement . . . 'tis through I am with happiness now, I guess . . . would to God we'd never known each other. . . . Oh, go! . . . go away, please! . . . I — I just can't bear it." . . .

Before the infinite pathos of her hopeless look and bitter words the strong man shook with his emotion until speech seemed beyond him. For, remorse-stricken though he was, beneath her reproach he glimpsed the evidence of so great a love that he

could only stand and regard her with awed amazement. Aye! — well he knew now, that come what would or could, all that love was his, and would be his forever. Suddenly he leaned forward with outstretched arms and struggling, heart-wrung words burst from his lips; a golden gleam from the sinking sun, just then, lighting up and intensifying the manly beauty of his strong, clean-cut features.

"Mary!" he cried hoarsely. "Oh, Mary, my girl. I've been thoughtless — I didn't know! . . . forget — forgive!" . . .

Dazedly the girl stared for a moment at the imploring face of the man she loved, her misery-numbed brain failing at first to grasp the significance of his impassioned appeal. Then a quick, joyful light of comprehension dilated her great weary eyes, and with an unsteady movement she arose from her seat on the stone and swayed towards him, sobbing in her throat. The next minute her round arms were about his neck, her eager lips sought his — and they were quite alone.

Long he held the overstrung girl in his arms, kissing and soothing her with every endearment that a man's love can command in such ecstasies; smoothing her glorious hair and pressing his cheek to hers with whispered, broken words of affection until she became calmer, and her happy tears ceased.

Then, gently, he told her the news of his changed fortunes and, drawing forth the lawyer's letter, bade the astonished girl read its contents.

"And now, my dear, I want you to read this, too," he said. "You have the right to."

And reverently he handed her the letter of his old dead benefactor, silently watching her face as she perused its contents. He saw the light gradually fade from her eyes, which commenced to fill with tears. Her lips quivered and she began to sob again softly, as she read on, rocking herself to and fro and making no attempt to hide her emotion. Presently she ended the missive and looked across at her lover with glistening eyes.

"Oh! . . . the poor old fellow . . . that poor old soldier . . . oh! this is *too* pitiful for anything! . . . How he must have suffered when he lost her — waiting patiently all those years!" . . .

She continued to gaze silently at him awhile. Then suddenly, with her wet eyes blazing with her great love, she leaned forward and flung her arms around his neck again with passionate abandon, still clutching the letters.

"Fwas ut for money ye waithed, ye foolish man?" she cried, relapsing into her soft Hibernian brogue as she patted his shoulder caressingly. "Och, glory be! but 'tis glad I am ye didn't tell me — or show me thim letthers till — till afther! . . . 'Tis little ye must know av th' heart av a woman loike me! . . . Och, me bhoy! me bhoy! . . . a pauper I'd have married ye . . . an' loved ye still . . . for yersilf alane!"

For answer, Ellis tipped her head back on his arm and kissed her fondly.

"Aye! . . . I guess you would!" he returned, with a grim chuckle. "And then p'r'aps both of us 'ud have been sorry forever after! . . . No, my dear! . . . when Poverty knocks on the door, Love

'beats it' out of the window! . . . I've seen too many of these 'Love in a shack' businesses . . . everything's all hunkadory at first . . . but it don't last. . . . You and I've worked long enough for the powers that be. . . . Now that's all changed. . . . You shall never know sorrow or worry again — if I can help it, Mary, my girl!"

Cheek to cheek, they were silent awhile, gazing dreamily across at the distant "Rockies." Then he continued quietly: "First thing I must get my discharge from the Force. I'll forward an application to 'purchase' tomorrow! Special case . . . under the circumstances, I think the O.C.'ll recommend it all right, though as a rule he's dead against this 'purchasing' business . . . don't know but what he isn't about right, too . . . anyway, 'Isch ga bible!' . . . I'll work it somehow within a month. Then we'll hit for Europe, Mary. A downright good long easy-going trip . . . taking our time and lazying around in all the beautiful old places we've read or heard about, and never seen. . . . Rome, Venice, and some of those old Moorish places in Spain. Then when we're tired of them and want some amusement and change of scene we'll go to Paris, or London — see all the best plays and hear all the best singers. Later we'll go on down through the Mediterranean to the north coast of Africa, and see Tunis and Algiers and Cairo. By and by, when we're tired of running around, we'll 'beat it' for this country again and settle down on a place of our own. It won't be a 'rawnch,' like the Honorable Percy's, either. . . . Guess I know how to run one as it *should* be run. I know of a peach of a place —

sou'west of here — right on the Elbow . . . pretty place, too — bush all round it and all kinds of good feed range and shelter. It's an ideal place for either horses or cattle — horses especially. Belongs to old J. G. Robinson. He's getting on in years now and wants to quit the game. I know he'd sell out to me — I know him well. It's the open range and the foothills of 'Sunny Alberta' for me and you, Mary dear — somewhere in the West, anyway . . . where we can look across at the 'Rockies' — like we're doing now. We'd never be happy anywhere else. Of course . . . you won't be cooped up on this precious ranch-in-perspective *all* the year round . . . neither of us, for that matter. It won't be necessary, for I'm going to try and get Barney Gallagher to come to me as my manager. I fancy I can fix things with him."

The girl, smiling at his enthusiasm with a little happy ejaculation, shook him impulsively.

"Oh, let's wake up!" she cried. "Are we only dreaming? . . . are you *sure* this isn't only just a beautiful dream, from which we'll wake up presently? I can't realize it's all true, yet!"

He tilted her chin up and gazed into the glorious hazel eyes lovingly.

"No, my dear," he murmured, the hard lines of his somber face softened into an expression of dreamy, quiet peace. "It's no dream this time. I'm done with my hopeless, empty dreams now! I'm a poor man no longer! Oh, Mary, my girl! My great big splendid-looking wife-to-be! . . . how I surely do love you! Promise me you're going to be very, very happy now, and give me another kiss!

We'll have to be getting back. I don't want to be getting into Mrs. T's bad books again," he added, grinning. "She gave me orders . . . very peremptory orders . . . but I think I can report that I've carried 'em out! Now give that kiss!"

What a wonderful change — spiritually and physically — a little love can effect! Gone were all poor Mary's dark shadows, pallor, and weary despondency. Once again her laughing long-lashed hazel eyes shone with the happy lights of yore. Locked in each other's arms, for the time being, in a rose-tinted world of their own and completely oblivious to their surroundings, they happened to sway up against Johnny who, turning his head, with a mildly inquiring eye, tucked up his nigh fetlock and nibbled at them for sugar, nickering softly the while.

And Mary's horse, down on the flat below, whinnied back a responsive "All's Well."

GLOSSARY

- AASVOGEL — (*Dutch Taal*) A species of South African vulture.
(*Carrion.*)
- ALLEMACHTIG — (*Dutch Taal*) Almighty!
- ADIOS — (*Spanish*) Good-by!
- DEKHO — (*Hindustani*) Look.
- DISSELBOOM — (*Dutch Taal*) Wagon-tongue.
- DOPPER — (*Dutch Taal*) A term generally applied to the Boers in
S. A.
- DOED — (*Dutch Taal*) Dead.
- DORP — (*Dutch Taal*) A small town.
- DRINK HAEL — (*Dutch Taal*) Signifying "Drink hearty!"
- DRONK — (*Dutch Taal*) Drunk.
- EYCK! EYCK! AZI-WAN-N! ARI-TSEMAH! HAMBAL-KE! — (*Kaffir*
expressions, urging on horse, oxen, or mule) Literally — "Get up
there! Go on!"
- INSPANING — (*Dutch Taal*) Harnessing up horse, oxen, or mule
teams.
- INDABA — (*Zulu*) Talk, language.
- I KORNER — (*Dutch Taal*) An expression of incredulity.
understand!"
- INTOMBI — (*Zulu*) Young woman.
- ISCH GA BIBBLE! — (*Yiddish*) "I should worry!"
- JA — (*Dutch Taal*) Yes!
- KINDERS — (*Dutch Taal*) Children.
- KOPJE — (*Dutch Taal*) Small hill, or butte.
- KRANTZES — (*Dutch Taal*) Rocky precipices.
- LAAGER — (*Dutch Taal*) Camp, abode.
- LEUGENAAR — (*Dutch Taal*) Liar.
- MEERKAT — (*Dutch Taal*) A species of animal like a gigantic
gopher which burrows on the veldt.
- MYJNHEER — (*Dutch*) Mr.
- N'DIPE MANZI — (*Kaffir*) "Give me some water!"
- NEE-MOYEE — (*Cree*) "No!" (Pronounced "Naz-mo-yer.")
- OUTSPAN — (*Dutch Taal*) Unharnessing horse, oxen, or mule teams.
- PASEUR — (*Spanish*) Walk.
- PRONTO! — (*Spanish*) "Quick! Look sharp!"

- SALUE! — (*Signifying*) "Here's luck!"
- SAKU BONA N'KOS! — (*Kaffir*) "Good day, Chief."
- SAKU BONA, UMLUNGU — (*Kaffir*) "Good day, White Man!"
- SJAMBOK — (*Dutch Taal*) Rawhide whip.
- "SKIET DIE VERDOE SCHEPSEL!" — (*Dutch Taal*) "Shoot the damned rascal!"
- SOOR — (*Hindustani*) Swine.
- TAAL — South African Dutch language.
- TREK — (*Dutch Taal*) March, travel.
- TRONK — (*Dutch Taal*) Gaol.
- UITLANDER — (*Dutch Taal*) Outlander. Unfranchised by the S. A. Republic.
- "UMBAGI!" — (*Kaffir*) Signifying "Move on there!" "Get along!"
- UMLUNGU — (*Kaffir*) "White man!"
- VIERKLEUR — (*Dutch Taal*) The flag of the late South African Republics.
- "VOERTSEK, DU VERDOMDE SCHELM!" — (*Dutch Taal*) "Get out, you damned rascal!"
- VROUW — (*Dutch Taal*) Wife.
- "WACHT-EEN-BIETJE!" — (*Dutch Taal*) "Wait a bit!"
- "WANA!" — (*Kaffir*) "Stop!" "Halt there!"